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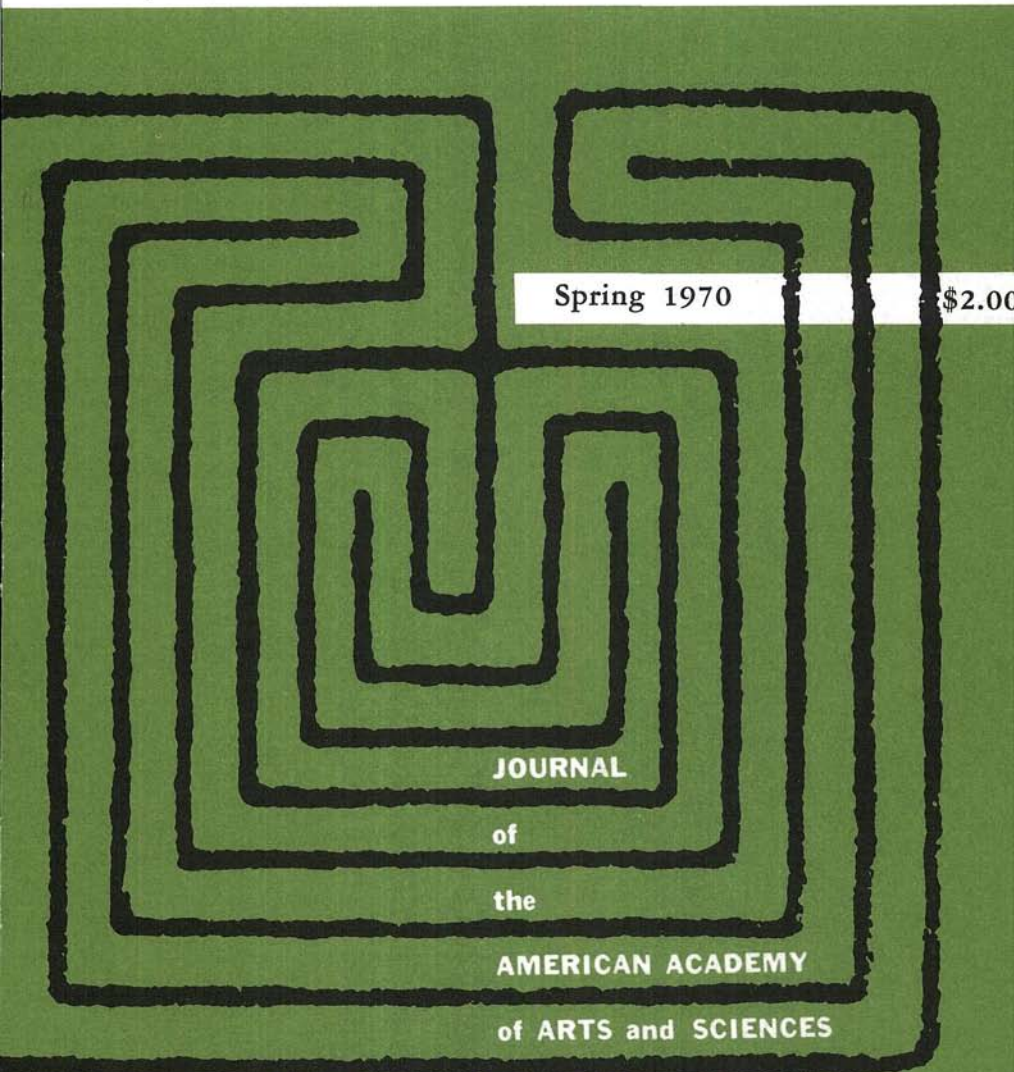

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ERIC WEIL

Humanistic Studies: Their Object, Methods, and Meaning

I

THERE IS a widespread feeling of uneasiness in the field of humanistic studies. It shows everywhere: Teachers are not sure of what they ought to teach; pupils doubt the value of what they are offered; in universities where the views of alumni and friends matter, there is hesitation over the distribution of money to various fields of research and instruction; and public universities tend more and more to support projects that are immediately or potentially useful.

What is wrong with the humanities? If a candid adversary were asked this question, his answer would probably be twofold: First, society does not need specialists in the humanities. A certain cultural veneer remains desirable, of course, and the humanities ought to remain in the college curriculum, but we ought not to spend an important part of the global intellectual force at our disposal on forming scholars and researchers in this field. Second, excepting countries where university studies give direct access to careers in the secondary school system, the pressure of student demand for humanistic study is not overwhelming. University teachers themselves complain about the difficulties they have in finding good graduate students and, above all, students prepared, willing, and able to acquire the sort of general culture necessary if new perspectives are to be opened and interesting results (as opposed to simply positive ones) are to be obtained. These criticisms are not independent of each other: Young people will not flock to the humanities if the society which determines their outlook does not consider humanistic studies useful, important, rewarding, and materially promising.

The question then becomes one of defining what society—that is, the prevalent feelings and attitudes of the average citizens or their leaders—implicitly regards as useful: everything that leads to

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greater riches, riches more equally distributed, a greater feeling of security and greater security, and a constantly increasing average life expectancy. Everybody—the man in humanistic studies as well as his neighbor—has to admit, and humbly admits, that the humanist does not contribute much to the attainment of these ends. In his own eyes, the humanist belongs to that leisure class of famous (or infamous) memory that prospers at the expense of other people's toil. In relation to production and organization, he is a parasite. Hence he develops a bad conscience which in turn acts on students who feel that something is wrong not only with him, but also with the situation in which he finds himself.

II

Are we then to say with brutal frankness that we had better drop humanistic studies, at least on the level of research and scholarship, and content ourselves with transmitting the not necessary but pleasant knowledge of our history, literature, and philosophy? The answer would have the charm of consistency, but it would not be exhaustive. If that were all there were to the situation, the problem would have disappeared long ago along with humanistic studies. Surprisingly, both have survived. More surprisingly, at this time when humanistic studies are under attack from both the natural and the social sciences, a revolt against the implicit definition of what is useful and what is not is gaining momentum in all modern countries. This society of riches, security, and comfort is said to be bad, not worth preserving; it is meaningless and inhumane. No matter what the results, revolution is seen as good in itself because it fights what is radically evil. The text and melody are sufficiently well known so that it is unnecessary to belabor the point. Nor would it be worthwhile to tell these searchers for purity that in all probability they are working for the people they like least—authoritarians, technocrats, the Establishment. The argument would not persuade them because consequences do not trouble people exclusively interested in what they see as salvation. But one should not neglect the simple fact that all these very different discourses have one trait in common: They belong to the order of the humanities, their founding fathers are philosophers and poets, their heroes are not to be found among the scientists nor, occasional invocations notwithstanding, among the social scientists, organization being bad in itself and social calculus being inadmissible.

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The situation is paradoxical. At a time when anti-rationalistic revolt dominates the minds not of the majority, but of the most active part of the younger generation in the universities, when their leaders come from the departments of humanistic, literary, and historical studies and also from the psychological and social studies, fields where revolt against *objectivating* teaching and research is prevalent, no group feels more insecure, more out of touch with present-day reality than the representatives of precisely these sectors of university life.

III

It might be convenient, though pedantic, to start with a definition of humanistic studies, since the term itself seems so ambiguous today. Three generations ago such an exercise would have appeared superfluous and even childish. A humanist was somebody who studied classical literature, knew his history, and (at the very least) had a good knowledge of what the great thinkers of the past, religious and secular, had taught since the (mythical) day when a reborn humanity went back to the source of all true learning and rediscovered its own original, unadulterated nature. Man had found again his true models, his authentic values, and from then on, he knew what to imitate, what heroes to follow, what paradigms to study to approach perfection in art, poetry, philosophy, and religion. (There was no difference in the attitudes of humanists—religious, a-religious, or anti-religious—as to the principal direction of their search.) Even when, as in the famous discussion between modernists and traditionalists during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in France, one of the parties maintained that the present was able to surpass the works of classical antiquity, it affirmed that it was able to go further than the men of old, but only further along the same lines. Science, as we now know it, was no competitor of the humanities. The scientist remained a man who had received a humanistic education even when he revolted against it. Very often his inspiration came from classical sources; Galileo, Descartes, and Bacon are cases in point.

This situation no longer exists. No doubt there are people for whom tradition, and particularly classical tradition, remains indisputably the only valid one. They seem to occupy a position, however, from which nobody wants to dislodge them because no one is interested in occupying it himself. The main stream leaves the

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traditionalist high and dry. Society is interested in material prosperity. A quite new respect for applied and pure science has produced a deep distrust for any kind of learning that lacks criteria of progress comparable to those of the sciences. There is a tendency to refuse everything that leads only to a literary career or a teaching post in humanistic studies, both considered to be social luxuries.

Humanistic studies have not remained stationary. Their transformation was in part a reaction to mathematical and scientific rationalism. Modern literatures were studied (at first by classical philologists and later by others following their methods); the "dark ages" were rehabilitated (with a vengeance); national character played an ever-growing part (often for nationalistic motives); and Romanticism discovered the value of the irreducible singularity of artists, thinkers, poets, and historians (sometimes to the point where the questions of true or false and good or bad were eliminated as classical prejudice). All efforts to bring humanistic studies up to date, far from alleviating misgivings, have strengthened the impression that these studies are not quite serious, if seriousness is to be defined by strictness of method and regularity of progress. Even the unity of their subject-matter seems to have been destroyed.

IV

Yet the situation may not be quite so desperate as it appears. In fact, if one looks not at the output of humanistic studies, but at their fundamental preoccupation, they remain true to their historical origin. They are interested in man, his works and acts, in human models, and in man as a free agent. Consequently, humanistic studies do not coincide with the social sciences, where man is equally the focus, but is essentially considered as an agent determined by the setting in which he lives and acts. The concern is not with a free individual agent, but with the conditions for acting.

The ominous term "free" ought not to inspire metaphysical fears; in this context it simply means that the observer arrives at a point where he cannot assign a precise cause to the event he is studying, but is only able to indicate those conditions without which the event could not possibly have taken place. In other words, man is considered the source and origin of his works—in art, literature, philosophy, and history (even in science if an individual scientific work or the science of an epoch is regarded not as a valid contribution to science, but as the outcome of a decision, choice, or

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way of thinking). Humanistic studies, we might say, are essentially historical.

Before developing the consequences that this definition (or description) implies for the method of the humanities and their possible ideal of "scientificity," it might be useful to reflect on the meanings of the term "history." "History" is taken here as designating any kind of inquiry in the field of the human past. It is, therefore, not limited to what is ordinarily taught as history, but includes the history of art, language, literature, institutions, science, religion, philosophy, literary, textual, and aesthetic criticism, interpretation of works and monuments, research of artistic, poetical, political, and religious forms, their mutual relations, their first appearances, their withering away, and their rekindling. This wider meaning necessarily encompasses the narrower one. All acts and all works are affected by the material condition of their time, the political, economic, military, and technological setting in which they have been produced. These conditions do not explain—that is, reduce to a series of factors from which we can rebuild with quasi-mechanical necessity—what we are interested in as humanists. But without these conditions the object of our inquiry would not have existed. Hence, an essential connection obtains between humanistic studies and history in the traditional meaning, such that the humanities are related to the whole of the social sciences (and even to the exact sciences).

If history is conceived in this manner, its main object, even its only one, is to understand the past, starting with the surviving traces of the self-understanding of that past. It would be unnecessary to insist upon the philosophical problems that lurk behind this simple statement; it would be ridiculous to pretend to solve them *en passant*. But some remarks might not be out of order. History is inevitably a second-level discourse: It has to do with another, "primitive" discourse not necessarily formulated in words and sentences, but contained and discoverable in many kinds of documents, such as works of art, institutions, and customs, all of which express a certain fundamental attitude, a world-view, a way of life, what has often been called in a vague manner a "philosophy." Such a "philosophy" is not explicitly present in the documents; it is "natural" for the people who live in this human world (which includes the world of nature as they interpret it) to employ this excellent formula. It is the historian who regards this world and analyzes its concepts, categories, and structures. He is able to do

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so because he belongs to another world, because what was "natural" has for him become astonishing and surprising. So, his discourse treats of discourses that frequently he is the first to elaborate as such, while the people whom he considers did not trouble themselves with conscious expression of their (lived) world-view. Consistency of presentation and presentation with a view to consistency are normally absent from first-level discourse. On the contrary, their appearance indicates the decline of this "philosophy": What has been formulated expressly becomes by the very fact of formulation an object of discussion, criticism, doubt, and is on the point of being overthrown.

The historian's discourse, on the other hand, pretends to be consistent and must be so if history is not to become the field of arbitrary assertions, if it is to lead to understanding. The whole undertaking would become impossible if the interpretative discourse were contradictory in itself. The historian has to reconstruct the human reality he is interested in; to construct out of his given materials what Max Weber called ideal types, consistent fundamental attitudes, value systems, and worlds that never existed in ideal purity, but that furnish us with the measuring rods by means of which reality, always mixed and confused, may be understood. Reality becomes understandable when it is interpreted as the sum of deviations from the conceptual constructs that accomplish what in other fields is done by concepts like "health" or "economic equilibrium," which are no more present in reality, but in whose absence reality could not be grasped and analyzed.

An obvious consequence (obvious truths are easily forgotten and neglected) is that the historian's discourse is subject to the rules of common logic. The point deserves some stress. The possibility of a first-level discourse exists and very often passes into reality in the field of history. This is true not only in historical novels and poetry, but also in many kinds of criticism and in hermeneutics in general, where personal reactions, impressions, and perspectives are presented in the raw without any pretense of logical consistency and without admitting the possibility of a regular discussion of the views developed. One may validly object if it is shown that a historian, an interpreter of works of art and poetry, of institutions, contradicts himself, or avoids contradiction only by refusing to exhibit his principles, or refuses to exhibit his underlying principles by invoking intuition, genius, or personality. A poetical discourse on poetry is not that of a historian, although it may be a valuable document or

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even a work of genius. All this is, of course, only a formal statement about formal rules; but it would be pernicious to despise the logical form which, admittedly, does not produce the content, but without which no content could be presented validly—that is, scientifically.

V

If the preceding considerations are admitted, we would at least have gained a delimitation of the field of humanistic studies and a first condition of scientific work within those limits. This would only be a beginning; far more is required if we are to come to grips with our initial concerns.

What, then, are humanistic studies as such? What is their method? Where are we to find criteria permitting us to distinguish arbitrary utterances and personal views from scientific theses and justifiable theories? What lurks behind the expression (which seems unavoidable) of "what interests the humanist?" Do we choose our themes and objects at will? Is there a force that directs us? Is there a difference between the "objectively" important and the interests of a crank? Why are certain subjects dropped, and why do they return to favor?

Such questions are innumerable; they express the feeling of insecurity mentioned at the start. We know the nature and limits of our field, but are not quite certain of our purpose and are not persuaded that our work is scientific. If it were, such questions would not be asked or at least they could be answered easily. If, to quote Kant, there is only so much science as there is mathematics in any field, the scientific situation of the humanities becomes highly dubious. It suffices to replace the word "mathematics" in the Kantian saying by the wider formula "hypothetical-deductive systems," and the case begins to look quite desperate. No humanist has ever constructed his objects starting with axioms; he accepts them as they are given to him, and they are given to him as *his* objects, precisely in their unique and individual reality. There is no science in the field of the humanities, one is sorely tempted to declare; history is literature, evocation, invocation, and systematized poetry.

This opinion would not be so widespread if there were not so much to accredit it. Historically, there was a reaction first against a conception of history seen not as research comparable to, though specifically different from, other activities of the same order, but

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as an over-all science of the past viewed as a structured totality with its laws, or, rather, its fundamental and hence single law. There was not a methodology of historical inquiry, so much as a metaphysics of becoming. Humanity as a unit had its unique history with its unique meaning. It was easy to show that this unique meaning differed from philosopher to philosopher—from Saint Augustine to Comte, Hegel, Marx, and so on. Nothing is easier to understand than the resulting skepticism. Both critical idealists as well as positivists went from one extreme to the other. History had to do with facts, not with a general law, although particular laws might be discovered in economics, sociology, and other specialized disciplines concerned with the human past. These facts were not necessarily transmitted without errors; the historian's work consisted largely in finding out "how things had really happened," a question science was able to handle. Once the facts were ascertained, there remained only the task of arranging them in a coherent narrative. And then everything broke down again, for how could one put together these facts in a manner that avoided arbitrariness? The historian had to choose his facts; he could not inscribe all of them on his tablets. He had to designate the important events and throw out what did not matter. He could not avoid giving direction or meaning to his narration—and he was back where he had started: at a metaphysics of history, only with the conviction that there was no way to justify his procedure. Subjectivism, relativism, and skepticism—all of which the "methodologist" had tried to eliminate—carried the day.

It would be difficult to maintain that this view had lost its weight with historians, who, like others, remember philosophy as what they have learned in their youth (just as philosophers often remain true to what they have learned about science in school). The thesis, nevertheless, is clearly wrong.[1] No historian has ever had to do with atom-like facts; facts are always given in a context, as members of a series or parts of an order. They are related to certain parameters which permit one to describe and analyze them. Of course, historical knowledge advances, and it is not at all surprising that history must and can always be rewritten. New facts come to light; new methods are discovered; scientific theories of a "societal" order or of natural science render necessary new appraisals and introduce parameters unknown or neglected before. But all this does not lead to relativism and skepticism, no more here than in the exact sciences. At any given moment we are able to

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establish the facts because the facts are given in their "natural" relations, and the relations are present in the historical facts themselves. In other words, there is an ascertainable difference between fact and fiction, truth and error, objective historiography and political, confessional, and moral propaganda. The fact that our criteria become more exacting, our methods more refined, and our material knowledge richer is not an objection against the possibility of non-subjective, non-relativistic historiography; it is an argument in favor of it.

Consequently, an old, wearisome, and, at bottom, factitious problem disappears, and the historian may go at his work with the best of conscience. The facts are given and given in the framework of their relations; they are not constructed or deduced. Objectivity and truth have, therefore, their specific meaning, specific because they are not what they are in exact, hypothetical-deductive systems. If we want to be circumspect, we shall have to speak of criteria for untruth and subjectivism, for means of criticizing theories, affirmations, and constructions, and of progressing systematically with the help of ever-advancing methods for determining errors. We shall never know the whole truth about the whole of history, but no historian will exact so much from his colleagues or from himself. Perhaps we shall never be able to indicate *the* meaning of a work of art or a poem, but we shall always be in a position to show that this or that interpretation is untenable: because it does not comprehend all aspects of the poem or the work of art, or because it contradicts its expressed or underlying convictions, feelings, and basic attitudes, or because it tries to submit it to questions which in its time would have been inconceivable. There always is a way to decide any question under discussion, although new approaches may have to be developed. Any problem which demonstrably has no solution, here as elsewhere, becomes *ipso facto* meaningless. The humanities are scientific, notwithstanding that their "science" is *sui generis*.

VI

The objectivity of the humanities might be shown in another seemingly independent manner. The social sciences are situated on the same terrain as the humanities—that of history. They are not interested in individual acts as such, but they deal with such acts globally considered. They do not go into the private convictions of

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John Doe; they look at the group of which he is a member or at him as representative of this group. Their method is statistical; their purpose is to discover necessary relations within a certain series, more or less well-defined to start with and progressively better defined as methods gain in precision. But they always have to do with human beings *qua* actors and with the conditions under which these beings act or are acted upon.

This being so, it is only natural that history (in the most widely defined meaning) and the social sciences are in constant interaction. Facts discovered may oblige us to revise theories; new theories lead to a reappraisal of historical writing, its sources, and bias. Since the historian is always obliged to fill the lacunae in his sources, no series of documents ever being complete, the writing of history depends, perhaps to a larger extent than is currently admitted, on the development of the social sciences, exactly as these sciences depend upon the discoveries of the historian and the observations of the surveyor of the contemporary scene. History produces social science(s) to answer the question of historians who need new or more precise parameters for ordering their materials. Social sciences receive from the historian the facts necessary to their specific methods, methods which can only be developed in contact with historical knowledge of the past and the near-present.

The "foreign relations" of history go even further afield. The natural sciences are indispensable tools for historical (and social) research. The date of an eclipse or the epidemiology of a case of bubonic plague will be taken into account when such facts permit the historian to correct or confirm his sources and make causal explanations. Although such explanations indicate only necessary and not sufficient conditions for historical understanding, their negative, critical value can scarcely be overstated. The link between the humanities, on the one hand, and logic and social and even natural sciences, on the other, is organic and indestructible.

Suddenly, everything seems all right with the humanities. We have solid foundations for scientific criticism; we possess, at least ideally speaking, the possibility of settling any meaningful debate; progress becomes measurable. What more could we ask? We are not scientists in the manner of mathematicians or theoretical physicists, but that is natural given our subject-matter. We can only build *ideal types* of consistent world-views, human attitudes, and actions; we might be able (and that would be the task of a philosophy we need) to unify these types and discover not first laws, but

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first meaningful structures which such a philosophy would have to detect in an uninterrupted and reciprocal (dialectical) interchange between the humanities and the social sciences. If only we could liberate ourselves from the obsession with criteria and ideals which cannot and should not be ours, everything would be fine.

VII

Would it? The scientific respectability of humanistic studies has been vindicated. We could add that a problem has been solved implicitly that seems to trouble many among those who pursue these studies, although (as far as the present writer understands) this problem ought not to worry anybody: the importance of new scientific theories, facts, relations, and techniques. Humanists have always profited by what scholars in other fields discovered. Archaeological field work transformed ancient history; the reinterpretation of Greek and Latin texts, documents, monuments, and economic theory had a decisive influence on the writing of political and cultural history. The process has often been painful for specialists educated in other methods, since it requires a certain effort to understand, acquire, and learn to handle methods and theories one is not used to. But there is nothing revolutionary in what is going on today. Psychoanalysis, statistics, and structural analysis provide the humanist with new tools he must employ simply because they are there. These tools give him the opportunity to look at his material from new perspectives—giving new answers to old questions, asking new ones, enriching his knowledge, and deepening his understanding. But growing pains are no mortal illness. What we have (to use a slightly old-fashioned term) are new auxiliary sciences.

Nevertheless, misgivings persist, ill-defined and difficult to seize upon. Perhaps it might help to consider seriously the expression "auxiliary sciences." Auxiliary in relation to what? Auxiliary in relation to the humanities, of course. But does it not then follow that the humanities should have their own kind of "scientificity," besides and above that of these sciences which, it is true, originate in the humanities themselves? An accountant uses arithmetic, but he is not therefore an arithmetician. A humanist knows and uses statistics, archaeology, and psychology, but he just uses them; he is not a specialist in any of these fields, nor does he actively, and as a humanist, further the progress of such sciences. He is able to

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eliminate error and nonsense and, within these limits, establish truth, a truth always subject to revision and correction, but truth nevertheless. His case would be no worse than that of the scientist, who also remains subject to refutation by experience and for whom a wider theory transforms what is basic into a special case. But this movement is intrinsic to the sciences; it is not so in the humanities. Apparently, the humanities do not promote scientific progress, but rather undergo it. Should the humanities be in a situation comparable to that of philosophy, which has given birth to the sciences and has remained obstinately *unscientific,* unless by an arbitrary decree a part of philosophy—called scientific because formalized or formalizable—is proclaimed the only serious philosophy, whatever such an expression may mean in the absence of any non-circular definition of seriousness? Philosophy in the traditional sense asked everyday questions—about good and evil, about the role man was to play if he wanted to lead a decent, humane life, and about nature, the state, and the beautiful. To give answers to such questions, philosophy developed what we now call sciences, and discovered that these sciences got out of hand. They acquired autonomy, lost their relation to these naive and fundamental (fundamental because naive) questions, and became meaningless—that is, of concern only to the specialist as such, and not to the human being in his living totality. This totality by definition is unscientific because every science has its limited field. No physicist votes or gets married or fights *qua* physicist, but as a human being. Philosophy would then be concerned with what the sciences cannot and do not wish to handle, a sort of original mixture out of which sciences crystallize, but which itself remains inexhaustible. Should we not fear (or might we not hope) that the case of the humanities offers a strict analogy?

"Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" are the last words in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus.* There exists something we cannot speak about—not scientifically or logically. Of course, we do speak about it, as Russell pointed out in his *Introduction* to the *Tractatus:* "That which he calls the mystical can be shown, although it cannot be said." The apology might well be adequate, Russell goes on, but it left him "with a certain sense of intellectual discomfort"—exactly, we are tempted to say, with the misgivings of the humanist. The answers in the humanities, to present the case in another aspect, are all correct; they are serious and scientific within their limits. But what about

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the questions themselves, their legitimacy and relevance? In every true, well-constructed science, the questions originate from the axioms, and the axioms are chosen as a function of the nature of the questions. The legitimacy of both becomes verifiable once the science under review has developed a sufficient degree of methodological conscience and consciousness. Certain questions and procedures are admissible; others are not. And there is an end to it, even though every particular science openly and without hesitation admits that there are other questions, methods, and facts it cannot handle and which therefore do not concern it: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent." Very good; but who is there to speak of that "inexpressible" which remains when all is said and done? It seems that this dangerous part is precisely the inheritance of the humanist and the philosopher. Such people are interested not in any particular perspective, but in man as a living being, acting and feeling, reasonable and passionate, coherent and incoherent.

VIII

The days of old are past when humanists, their pupils, and the public were sure of their values. We have no models to imitate, no ultimate standards of taste and perfection. Nor do we have (and this is a direct consequence of the disappearance of the idea of classical perfection) criteria for an "objectively" meaningful interpretation of the things we have to deal with. We are not sure of what we should transmit and of what we might drop.

If everything human concerns us, we can only choose arbitrarily. If every way of looking at human acts and works and every perspective is justified, none can be preferred. If every question may be asked, none is more relevant because none can be thrown out as irrelevant. Relativism and subjectivism have been eliminated from the field of history and historical facts; at present, however, they seem to return on the deepest level. Once we have seized a problem or a set of problems, we go ahead, develop particular procedures and sciences, try to answer specific questions, and proceed with order and method. But why struggle with *this* problem rather than with that other one?

The source of our troubles and worries is not to be found in the problems of method, scientific revolutions, or new techniques. What was an assumption at the start becomes explicit once we have

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eliminated all the methodological questions that obscure the real ones from our view. Humanistic studies have lost their innocence and with it their confidence in the absolute value of what they are doing. Historical consciousness has turned on itself and has learned to consider itself as a phenomenon among other historical facts, relative to certain social, cultural, and economic conditions. We no longer justify what we are doing by saying that *this* matters and the remainder is subordinate. Everything matters; nothing matters: Both of these affirmations are strictly equivalent. We feel obliged to understand everything human, but since we do not have minds of infinite capacity, anything will do and will have to do. On the level of problems (not of answers), personal preferences, idiosyncratic reactions, and individual tastes will decide; there is nothing else to direct our choice.

In short, we must live with the fact that we have to deal with things we value—because we value them. Generally speaking, this holds everywhere: A man becomes and remains a physicist because he values physics. There is a decisive difference, however, between the humanist and the physicist. The physicist, when asked, will say that everyone knows that physics is interesting; to distinguish things interesting (in physics) from others not so interesting, he applies criteria valid within the framework of physics. The question of the interest of physics as such does not trouble him. Theoretically speaking, however, perhaps it should, since great religious thinkers and philosophers have noted that natural sciences may be *vana curiositas* if one contemplates the meaning of human life. Our society confirms the physicist is his attitude. As a whole, society values results and defines them in terms of greater riches, better organization, and more stable social relations. Since the humanist does not receive this same comfort from his contemporaries, when he tries to justify what he is doing, he must admit that he deals with values and values only—not in his methodical inquiries, but in the choice of his questions. The answers are scientific, at least insofar as they remain subject to rational criticism; the questions are not.

It seems, then, that we confront once more the problem of subjectivism and relativism. The humanist chooses freely, with no way to determine which choice is good. Although such a view may appear plausible, again it is radically mistaken, wrong at its root. The humanist "chooses," but he chooses in a given cultural setting—in his time, for his time, and under the influence of his time. The culture of that epoch is not a mere collection of unrelated atom-like

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facts; even value facts are interrelated and form a unity. That unity is not clearly defined; nothing in a life process ever is. Clarification —conscious as opposed to unconscious, purely traditional, sentimental appraisal—is a task, not an arbitrary undertaking. It is the task of understanding oneself as a member of a given cultural tradition by understanding that culture and that tradition. We do not create new values any more than we ever created a constitution or a law; we only modify, reappraise, and transform what exists and has been valid until our time. We may reverse judgments and trans-value values, but we always start from what is there—what has acted upon us and has determined our views and ways even (perhaps especially) when we revolt against it.

IX

The essential difference between the sciences and the humanities is to be found on this level, and only here; the difference of method is only a consequence. The role of the humanist, in fact, is to question unceasingly not values (there are only two of them, positive and negative, appearing in different shapes in different fields—good and bad, beautiful and ugly, poets and poetasters, and so forth), but the value of cultural objects. He is constantly discovering and eliminating, proposing and rejecting; he elicits new meanings from old works and looks for an understanding of greater depth and wider horizon. He maintains a dialogue with his own cultural past so that he can grasp what is characteristic of his tradition as it lives in his present. His problem is to understand this present by comprehending the presence of the past that has molded him before he started remolding it. He incarnates the cultural consciousness of his time.

For this reason, his method for determining his essential problem is not and cannot be that of consistent, hypothetical-deductive discourses, which, if completely developed (in fact they never are, excluding purely formal discourses such as mathematics), would end in a monologue; humanistic studies are consituted by a dialogue "of the soul with itself," to quote Plato's saying, where nothing is ever definitive. Every new understanding changes the man who reached it. Every "result" becomes a starting point because we are not the same as we were before, once we have grasped what up until then was hidden from us (often under the veil of "evidence"

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and "unquestionable," "last" meanings). A new understanding of the Iliad or of Surrealism changes us, just as a new understanding of a historical act opens new vistas for possible decisions.

A look at the nature of the objects of humanistic studies leads us to the same conclusions. If these objects are, as we have maintained, expressions of human freedom, they will necessarily be inexhaustible since a free act is defined precisely by the absence of a (discoverable) last cause or ultimate motivation (in the sense of psychological "necessity"). We never encounter *the* sufficient conditions; all we find belongs to the realm of the indispensable, to those prerequisites without which the act could not have taken place. (This explains why particular sciences can be and have been developed in the field of the humanities, but only as sources of particular knowledge, not as sources of understanding.) This, it can be said *en passant,* characterizes the great work of art, the great decision, and the great poem as opposed to fakes, propaganda, or cleverness —all of which are uni-dimensional and therefore understandable once and for all. There is no more *the* true interpretation of great creative art than there is *the* true view of a tree. In both cases the infinite totality of possible perspectives is the thing itself. Asking for ultimate knowledge in this domain is asking for a sort of divine knowledge. That does not mean that anything might be said about any subject. We are perfectly able to show that this or that manner of interpreting a work or an act is perfectly meaningless because totally inadequate. Throwing out nonsense, however, does not lead to absolute truth. The dialogue that humanity has instituted (it does not matter, although in other respects the fact is of decisive importance, that only a part of humanity, our part, has done so) and by which it seeks to understand itself—an understanding of cultural sources and the living past—will never end, or will end only by accident. It is not that the answers are not scientific (in the defined, specific sense). Rather, it is that the questions go on forever.

X

Humanistic studies considered in this way do not need any justification; they justify (or condemn) what men are doing or are not doing, since they alone consider man as a free agent. They alone are able to present to humanity models for a meaningful life,

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to elevate into consciousness what dominates decisions and choices without appearing to dominate, and to show the inconsistencies and impossibilities of our wishes and ideals. Humanists have no reason to feel inadequate before the sciences, whose very strictness proves that they are "abstract"—that is, the sciences consider only isolated aspects of humanity and reality. It is not meaningless to ask why one should study physics or sociology; it would be meaningless to demand why one should give oneself to humanistic studies because only the humanist, not the physicist, can formulate and, if he succeeds, answer this question.

We said at the outset that the contemporary scene may serve as evidence. Indeed, the world-wide unrest among young and not-so-young people in the universities may be analyzed with the help of social sciences, but this unrest will not be quieted and soothed by simple description. The problem is one of morals (if that old-fashioned term may be forgiven), and of humanistic research and thought. No doubt, nearly everything we hear from our "revolutionaries" is confused and contains scarcely any positive, realizable proposals, even by implication. But this confusion helps demonstrate the importance of humanistic studies, not their irrelevancy.

It shows as well that we have not handled adequately the grand task of clarifying human problems and proposing possible solutions. This is only natural; the dangers of failing are of the same magnitude as are the possibilities for success. But fear is not a good counsellor for responsible action. Far too often we have looked for answers when we should have looked for problems, new perspectives, and living and livable relations between our inheritance and our present. Too often we have proceeded as if only *scientifically* solvable questions deserved our attention, or we have emphasized originality, as though it were necessary to teach that two and two make something interesting, if not four. Auxiliary sciences, instead of remaining ancillary, have gained mastery, just as fashionable discoveries have superseded what our predecessors had solidly established. Annalistic history of dead and meaningless facts has taken the place of the understanding of our own problems as they are reflected in history. Our own and omnipresent colleague Professor Dryasdust and his French brother Professor Tapir have prevented students from seeing what humanistic studies are about and what they can mean precisely for them, just as "geniuses" have convinced students that in our field anything may be said and taught. Our shortcomings, however, only show the grandeur of our

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undertaking: Bad doctors are no argument against medical knowledge.

We have lost the standards of the humanists of old; the standard unique to our society—efficiency—cannot provide a foundation for the humanities. Efficiency concerns means; humanistic studies, in the last resort, concern ends. But that will not release us from our grave and exalted responsibility. Who else is to look for human and humane standards? It may well be that youth exacts from us an education instead of mere instruction. Even a superficial analysis shows that all the muddle-headed *pronunciamentos* of today express a *moral* revolt against a society whose only values belong to the order of technique, organization, and material progress. It is the humanist's task to bring to consciousness and clarity what lurks behind these dumb reactions and confused cries. Nobody else can do it. The humanist alone can establish humanity's dialogue with its own unconscious or semiconscious drives, because he alone considers man a free being, a being who has to do with himself before and after he has to do with conditions and results.

The problem of the meaning of human life is not a new one. It preoccupied our ancestors; it has concerned cultures very different from our own. In our contemporary civilization this problem is in danger of being forgotten. The old sacred words of freedom, justice, and peace among men of good will are bandied about and no longer have any positive meaning; they are only useful in discrediting everything that exists without showing any possible alternatives. It is the humanist's task to open and render accessible the store of human possibilities contained in history, art, and poetry. Only in this manner can we discover concretely and positively what we want, and what we refuse and reject. It is not up to the humanist to give recipes or discover panaceas for our moral ills; there are none available to free beings. But possibilities exist, and new ones will be created if we start with an understanding of what we are and what we possess and what all too often possesses us because we have not taken possession of it. We are not condemned to pure negativism, mere destruction, and the blind hope that something will turn up. We may choose our life—not in the dark, but in the clear light of understanding knowledge. Nothing men have done, thought, or created is ever dead, though we may well treat it as if it were. Our standards exist, but are concealed behind *spontaneous* choices and refusals. The humanist alone can render them conscious. Socially prevalent values and humane aspirations are in

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contradiction. The time is out of joint; but that is not cursed spite. It gives the humanities their true nobility.

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1. Maurice Mandelbaum's book, *The Problem of Historical Knowledge* (original edition, Liveright Publishing Corporation: New York, 1936; paperback edition, Harper Torchbooks, Harper and Row: New York, 1967), was one of the first to show that this view was inconsistent with the real work of the historian. It set forth a pluralistic conception of history: Specific series exist and can be studied, but there is no general history for the historian although the problem might be legitimate for the philosopher of history. Paul Valéry, who hated history conceived as a general whole and as a lesson for the present, had come to comparable results. Cf. his letter to his friend A. Lebey, September, 1906 (*Oeuvres,* Pleiade, Gallimard: Paris, 1960, Vol. II, p. 1543), a document unknown until 1960.

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MORTON W. BLOOMFIELD

The Two Cognitive Dimensions of the Humanities

"What is love?
One name for it is knowledge."
Robert Penn Warren
Audubon: A Vision

THE HUMANITIES and those aspects of the social sciences that are like the humanities stand in a unique relationship to their subject-matter. The subject-matter of the humanities has an interior, a subjective dimension that competes in some ways with the humanistic method itself as a mode of understanding. We can know things, Thomas Aquinas says, *per cognitionem* or *per connaturalitatem*.[1] The humanities know in this dual way—from the outside or from the inside. And this double path of knowing is perhaps the chief characteristic of the study of humanities. It leads to the question Kierkegaard raised: Can one be both Leporello and Don Juan simultaneously? Leporello lists the thousand and one conquests of his master, while Don Juan enjoys them. Experiencing as well as knowing is a way of understanding, and the humanities have to wrestle with both modes and at certain reaches attempt some kind of synthesis or at least keep them in some kind of satisfying balance.

The scientific method does not face such a duality. Science can, unlike the humanities, keep a strict separation from its subject-matter. Even when the observer is himself an inescapable part of his observations, the connection creates an epistemological problem about objective accuracy, not an alternative to its way of knowing. Science has no interest in the inner feel or experience of what it studies. In fact, its ideal is existentially indifferent statements. But the humanities have a very peculiar relationship to their subject-matter, because the subject-matter can offer an alternative to them. George Simmel said that "Philosophy is, so to speak, the first of its own problems."[2] One can just read a novel or contem-

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plate a picture, give up the whole cognitive attempt, and still have a desirable experience. The subject-matter of the humanities offers an existential supplement or even alternative to itself. As students of the humanities, we are asking the reader and student by our scientific or classifying work to take an extra slice of cake, perhaps drier, more stale, and even moldier than the first.

Part of the humanistic process is obviously analytic and scientific. It is often, by contrast with its subject-matter, considered the dull part: setting up texts, writing biography, establishing facts, describing the historical and cultural background—the kind of material the older philological and humanistic journals specialize in. This "science of the humanities" treats the inner experience only as outer experience. If it is studying social facts and concepts, it adopts the "roles and games" approach in which nothing has any inward meaning except when it bears directly on the outer.

Yet the full study of the humanities, especially in the field of the arts, offers something more. This extra quality was not understood by A. E. Housman when he raised the matter of literary study in his Cambridge Inaugural Lecture in May 1911.

> Why is it that the scholar is the only man of science of whom it is ever demanded that he should display taste and feeling? Literature, subject of his science, is surely not alone among the subjects of science in possessing aesthetic qualities and in making appeal to the emotions. The botanist and the astronomer have for their provinces two worlds of beauty and magnificence not inferior in their way to literature; but no one expects the botanist to throw up his hands and say "how beautiful" nor the astronomer to fall down flat and say "how magnificent": no one would praise their taste if they did perform these ceremonies and no one calls them unappreciative pedants because they do not. Why should the scholar alone indulge in public ecstasy?[3]

Although Housman showed in his poetry that he knew what inward experience was, even if his was a very sentimental and self-indulgent knowledge, he does not seem to understand that the human sciences demand something more than the natural sciences nor that what he calls aesthetic qualities are partially forced into his experience by the very nature of scholarship, even when it is as austerely textual as his was. "Reality is different from, and more than, the totality of facts and events which anyhow is unascertainable," writes Hanna Arendt.[4] Or to put it the opposite way, as Gabriel Marcel writes, "I am not my life."[5]

External facts do not constitute the whole history of humanistic events and objects; they can be lived as well as understood. That

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external understanding may be important and fascinating I do not wish to deny. If we cannot say, as the Reverend David Scot said in 1827, that "we are in suspense whether the rabbit or coney be the Saphan of the Hebrew Bible,"[6] we can recognize the joy of factual discovery, the pleasure of a correct textual reading, and the delight of accuracy. Gaetan Picon writes, "L'oeuvre d'art—et singulièrement l'oeuvre litteraire—ne s'impose pas seulement à nous comme un objet de jouissance ou de connaissance; elle s'offre à l'esprit comme objet d'interrogation, d'enquête, de perplexité."[7] This challenge to find out, to inquire, to solve is one that to some cannot be rejected. Yet there is more to the humanities than facts and answers to the questions they offer to the spirit; they must be enjoyed and yet not just enjoyed. The double pull of the humanities puts us at times into a dilemma.

The popular feeling that to analyze a beautiful poem or picture is somehow a desecration is not entirely ridiculous; it has some truth in it. Experience can always laugh at analysis; Don Juan can always be amused by his amanuensis Leporello. But it must be remembered that Leporello can also enjoy Don Juan. Classification as well as experience has its joys, and experience can create its own dilemmas for the inquiring mind.

Can we not, as some would suggest, throw over the attempt to understand art and history and plunge into existentialistic reality? We can and indeed most people do. Can we not agree with St. Augustine that "Nemo nisi per amiticiam cogniscitur"? As scholars, it seems to me that we must do otherwise. There is something about events and human objects that only experience can give; no one but a black can understand certain aspects of the black experience. Yet there is something about the black experience that only someone who can get out of it and look at it from the outside can understand. Experience as such has a terrible incompleteness for the inquiring mind. Analysis is not enough, it is true, but it can satisfy in a very deep way when it is close to its objects. Although nothing is enough, informed enjoyment and a historical dimension to one's experience, a conviction of accuracy, have the power to answer nagging questions and demands and can civilize a man more than destroy him.

In these days when the whole enterprise of art and its historical study have become questionable to some people, it is right to look at the basic dilemma presented by this dualism. The pursuit of the humanities has become in some ways nightmarish. The knowledge

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explosion can destroy the humanities in a way that it cannot destroy the sciences. The human mind can no longer comprehend humanistic interpretations; there is no control to throw out erroneous theories, and of facts there can be no end. The criterion of corrigibility lacks in many aspects of humanistic study. Completeness as a humanistic goal is no longer possible. We must get back to basic questions: In what relation must experience stand to its understanding? How can we use intellectual analysis when we obtain understanding by experience? What is the relation of the subjective dimension of experience to its objective dimension?

These questions were basically raised by the Hegelian tradition in Germany in the nineteenth century. It is not my task here to go into the various answers proposed by Hegel himself, by Marx, by Dilthey and others. This has been and still is a continuing concern. I can only make a few tentative suggestions, so that we can perhaps see more clearly what English literature has to do with literature or the study of history with history.

This problem of outer and inner is related to the logical problem of the same and the different, a problem discussed at least since the twelfth century when Adelard of Bath wrote his *De eodem et diverso*[8] concerning minds that see similarities in things and those that see differences. We might call them "same-seers" and "difference-seers" respectively. Today we would say that the scientist attempts to see the sameness of things, attempts to put different things into the same category, whereas the humanist attempts to see the uniqueness of things, whereby one thing differs from all others. The Middle Ages viewed this relationship differently: The sciences saw the difference of things, the contemplator the samenesses. This perhaps is a measure of the differences between our outlook and the medieval qualitative outlook, but the general notion is useful even if in a logical rather than a psychological world of discourse. The problem has an abstract logical significance. Adelard knew, however, that reality was one and that it was all a matter of points of view (*respectus*) on the same universe.

Adelard could see the issue merely as a matter of *respectus,* but we cannot. We can agree that the reality is the same, but since nineteenth-century German philosophy came on the scene, and since the rise of modern existentialist philosophers, the division has come to nag at us in an especial kind of way. Both sides have enormous claims on us, and the question of reconciliation or balance has even more menacing implications.

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Marxism has argued that in action we unite both the subjective and objective and overcome the alienation of the understanding process. By emphasizing as a goal of philosophy change and not understanding, Marx and Engels believed that knowing and experience become one. One trouble with this solution is that action may become the judge of truth. It may all end in vulgar ideology, and political expediency can become the criterion of truth (although this criterion is by no means limited to Marxist or so-called Marxist states).

Modern myth and symbol thinkers find the solution in their especial subject. The archetypes are at once the most subjective and the most objective of intellectual patterns. If we plunge deeply enough into our own self, we shall discover a non-self in the depths of our being, a non-self possessed of archetypical patterns common to all men. This Jungean solution to the problem of inner and outer has many adherents these days, but because it denies the surface and the living body of art, to my mind it fails to account for diversity. It is all finally the same or a few sames; nothing is different. The myth thinkers are same-seers. I do not deny that such patterns may well exist, but I do not think that they can provide us with our solution except at the level of mystical experience.

The scientific approach that looks at experience and events and objects from the outside is so pervasive today that little really needs to be done to describe it. When it approaches a work of art, it attempts to see the structural and inner relations from a cognitive point of view. When it accounts for the work's being, it attempts to recreate the historical circumstances of its creation and at times the psychology of the author. If it cannot take the text as established, to establish it is also one of its tasks.

Historically, the scientific or objective point of view arose in Greece. Greek philosophy was attuned by some development we do not understand to interpret the world in terms of samenesses, to develop laws to explain the various manifestations, immanent laws according to which nature moves. Whether it be water or opposites, air or reason, the Greeks sought to subsume phenomena under one or more general principles. At the same time Greece developed a great art, an art so overwhelming that even to this day there is no artistic experience so powerful and so all-encompassing as its greatest products. But the subjective dimension of art was always strictly separated from reason and truth. Much classic Greek art, if it was not parodic or satiric, was religious in nature,

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both in subject-matter and in making possible the re-experience of divine or heroic events.

The Hebraic view emphasized experience and the subjective dimension. The objectivity of God was a revealing, an opening, a calling. The ancient Hebrews did not emphasize the unity of God by stating merely that He is one, but by stating "Hear O Israel the Lord your God is One." What one must know is not merely that God is one, but that God speaks to man that He is one. As Martin Buber wrote:

> The great achievement of Israel is not so much that it has told mankind of the one, real God, the origin and goal of all that exists, but rather that it has taught men that they can address this God in very reality, that men can say Thou to Him, that we human beings can stand face to face with Him, that there is communion between God and man.[9]

The subjective approach has its roots in ancient Israel and in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Its immediate goal is to seek the diversity and uniqueness of experience. Its method is to read closely, to see vividly, and to experience again the inner meaning of another being and, by extension, of an object.[10]

So far I have been chiefly writing as if the only task of humanistic endeavor is to account for works of art, but the humanities also embrace philosophy and history. Something should be said about these subjects as their inner or subjective dimension is perhaps not immediately apparent. We can always experience a work of art. But how do we experience history or philosophy?

I think it must at once be admitted that the objective part of the humanistic enterprise certainly occupies a greater role in the disciplines of history and philosophy than in the study of literature and art and music.[11] It becomes a question as to what is the inner dimension of both subjects, whereas one has no question as to the inner experience of literature, art, or music since the inner part of these is like life itself. Just as "I" can be "he" in life, depending on the stance, so one can enjoy Hamlet as experience and at the same time speculate about his character.

The inner experience of philosophy is, I think, what has been known through the ages as wisdom. One experiences philosophy by living or by associating with traditional wisdom, preserved in the ancient forms of proverbs, didactic epigrams, teaching poems, apothegms, riddles, charms, and prayer. At first sight the relation between a disquisition on the meaning of the word "good" and the

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assumption of the role of a wise and moral man seems to be very much apart. But if one considers the final goal of morality and ethics to be action, and in a deep sense it must be thus, one can see the inner side of even a linguistic-philosophic discussion. Parts of philosophy, such as logic, are essentially methodological and cognitive sciences, just as are parts of literature, for example, textual work; but there are ethics and metaethics as well as logic in philosophy. Even enterprises like this paper, which attempts to understand the meaning of the humanistic enterprise, have a lived aspect—or at least can have one.

History also has an inner dimension that may come from psychological reconstruction of the past or, even more profoundly, from the contemporary historical awareness and self-awareness of the historian. The historian who sees himself as part of history is re-enacting the historical experience in himself. This historicization of the historian as he writes or works is the main way his subject itself becomes a work of knowing. Needless to say, the historical awareness of the historian is fraught with danger; but when successful, it increases the greatness of his history.

Literary and art criticism can also be either scientific or existential in approach; sometimes they are both. A certain type of criticism attempts to get at the inward "feel" of what is being analyzed. Other types are structural and scientific. Normally the best work tries to relate the pattern to the experience. This kind of humanistic exploration comes closest to balancing the demands of both ways: It gives us a way of overcoming the dualism that must dominate humanistic study most of the time.

Humanistic study has, then, this unique characteristic—that its own subject-matter is in some way and in varying degree in competition with itself as a way of knowing. The humanities are a way of knowing dealing with an alternative way of knowing and are subject to all the restraints, contradictions, and ambiguities inherent in such a situation.

There is, of course, a slight inner dimension to the subject-matter of some of the sciences, as Housman has indicated. It is, however, very slight—much less than the objective dimension of humanistic study. Even when, as in biology, the subject is life, it is not consciousness as an experience but its physical basis that biology or biological psychology is interested in. Furthermore, as we have already stated, certain social sciences or parts of them also have an inner dimension, usually their historical and anthropologi-

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cal aspects. It is to these aspects of the social sciences that the humanistic scholar feels closest.

Because of this double mode of knowing, humanistic study at its best must be humble, aware that its subject-matter is a potential rival, and, finally, concerned with values. Its own enterprise must to some extent always be suspect and must create its own final justification not only by the Aristotelian dictum that "all men desire to know," but also by its contribution to the enrichment of another experience. Nor can humanistic study use the test of success and economy that science can use, except when in its most scientific phase. It must be torn between law and love and can never rest in one and forget the other.

The final end of scientific investigation in the humanities is to know everything; the final end of inner experience is to face the demonic. When both get out of hand, we have chaos indeed. The great novel of this struggle is *Moby Dick* and its hero is Ishmael. As Beongcheon Yu writes:

> Moby Dick becomes a masterpiece through its precarious balance, achieved by Melville's sure artistic instinct to subordinate Ahab to Ishmael.[12]

Ahab is demonic man; Ishmael is analytic man. Ishmael needs Ahab more than Ahab needs Ishmael, but humanity must have Ishmael to observe and control Ahab in order to be able to exist at all. The demonic ends only in destruction and anarchy; the analytic ends in the inhuman and the mechanical. But Ishmael is in the end victorious. The destruction of the *Pequod* creates a "vital center" from which a coffin life-buoy shoots up to save Ishmael. Alienation can ultimately find healing, and the act that ironically heals is the telling of the novel itself.[13]

Moby Dick begins with an etymology and names and then, like the encyclopedia it is, presents extracts about whales, thereby apeing completeness. Out of external knowledge of "whale" comes a story told by Ishmael who intersperses more information. The names and the extracts give us clues to the meaning of the novel. I wish merely to pause a moment at the names, for the "science" of names can provide us with the kind of bridge I think we are looking for.

In spite of Aquinas' comment that wise people do not worry about names,[14] one must say that Kabbalistic speculation about the names of God or the listing of the ninety-nine names of Allah

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that we find in Islam was a matter of the greatest import in overcoming the opposition between knowledge and experience in medieval times. There was then no problem about God, but there was a problem about naming Him.[15] In his *On the Divine Names*, the Pseudo-Dionysius in the sixth century posed for Christianity the problem that also faced Judaism and was later to confront the Moslem world.[16] If God is to listen to us, if He is to turn towards us, he must be called by His right name. Since a man will not turn to us if we call him by a wrong name, why then should God do so?

Naming is a very complex procedure and proper naming is even more puzzling. The whole process at some stage belongs to the vocative and deictic world, whether present or in mind.[17] Names are important essentially to the humanist, and in a way the goal of humanistic endeavor is to find correct names so that the world may respond to us. Priore Blanco, the arch-scientist, asks young Fabrizio in Stendhal's *The Charterhouse of Parma*, "What more do I know about a horse when I am told that in Latin it is called *equus*?" The "more" is what the humanities is finally all about.

Like most elements in life, and perhaps life itself, the humanistic endeavor at its highest moments must be a balance between antithetical forces. One of the outstanding characteristics of life is its inside-outside dichotomy. Merleau-Ponty says somewhere that the mind is in the body, but the body is also in the mind. In this respect, the humanities at their most ideal level imitate life itself, so that outside may become inside and inside, outside. At its highest, work in the humanities is akin to life itself.

Moby Dick presents the classical dilemma of pure exteriority versus pure interiority in the figures of Ishmael and Ahab, and this dichotomy is reflected in the original title of *The White Whale or Moby Dick*. One can regard the whale as white whale or one can chase Moby Dick. Moby Dick will ultimately destroy a man; the whale will ultimately be completely known and classified. But analytic man, when he experiences the vital center, can unite both species and name to return to tell a tale that begins "Call me Ishmael." The teller has learned that names are important and must come first. The White Whale *or* Moby Dick becomes The White Whale *and* Moby Dick. Ahab must, however, always go down to destruction so that Ishmael can learn and so that he may be preserved to tell a story—the very story, in fact, that tells us of Ahab and Ishmael.

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I do not believe that a bridge must always be thrown across the two cognitive dimensions of the humanities. We need both classification and experience. At times Bitzer's definition of a horse is required: "Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth . . ." and so on.[18] Sissy Jupe may really know more about horses than the egregious Bitzer, but we need him for a certain kind of understanding. At other times, "There are some enterprises in which a careful disorderliness [like life] is the true method."[19] On those occasions, we must plunge into the disorderliness of life. It is characteristic of the humanities to be balanced between the two. I would argue that the essence of the humanities is finally, then, a cognitive matter—a knowing about another knowing. But at times a link between the two must be built, and names both proper and common provide us with a way of doing this—possible through the art of literary criticism in its broadest sense. We must know the right names so that things and beings may respond to us. We must know what the names are. If we cannot at times be satisfied in both cognitive ways, we are doomed to an eternal split and to wandering in the night.

Finally, we must say again that the dichotomous nature of the humanities is a given that is desirable to overcome only at times. It is never possible to blend the two forever; they must remain two different modes, two different *respectus*. They finally *are*, and Don Juan and Leporello cannot become Don Leporello. The tension can never be finally relieved. However, moments of bridging can exist and each side can open to the other. One can be great as a humanistic "scientist," and one can be great as a phenomenological thinker or creator, and finally one can be great in both at once.[20] Perhaps in the last are the greatest achievements of all.

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1. *St. Thomas* I:1, 6 and II:II, 452. Cf. "A knowledge of things involves two considerations, that is, form and nature. Form appears in the external deposition of a thing; nature in its interior quality," Hugh of St. Victor, *De Sacramentis*, quoted in D. W. Robertson, Jr., *A Preface to Chaucer, Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1962), p. 297.

2. Cf. Kurt H. Wolff, ed., *George Simmel, 1858-1918, A Collection of Essays with Translations and a Bibliography* (Ohio State University Press: Columbus, 1959), p. 282.

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3. Quoted in the *Times Literary Supplement* (May 9, 1968), p. 476.

4. Hanna Arendt, "Truth and Politics," in Laslett and Runciman, *Philosophy, Politics and Society,* Third Series (Blackwell: Oxford, 1967), p. 131.

5. In an essay by Gabriel Marcel, translated as "On the Ontological Mystery," written in 1933.

6. David Scot, quoted in Charles Coulston Gillispie, *Genesis and Geology,* Harvard Historical Studies 58 (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1951).

7. Gaetan Picon, *L'ecrivain et son ombre* (Gallimard: Paris, 1953), p. 4.

8. Hans Willner, ed., *Des Abelard von Bath Trakat De eodem et diverso, Zum ersten Male herausgegeben und historischkritisch untersucht,* BGPMA4, 1 (Munster, 1903).

9. Martin Buber, *Hasidism,* trans. (Philosophical Library: New York, 1948), Introduction. Father Ong has pointed out to me that there is no vocative form of *Deus.* However, there are certainly Greek and Latin addresses to deities or the Supreme Deity.

10. The common view, going back in Anglo-Saxon countries largely to Matthew Arnold, that Hebraism is mainly puritanical and morally earnest is only true to a minor extent.

11. I shall omit discussion of linguistics which is partly a humanist discipline and those humanistic aspects of the social sciences, as posing special problems requiring special analyses.

12. Beongcheon Yu, "Ishmael's Equal Eye: The Source of Balance in *Moby Dick,*" *ELH,* Vol. 32, (1965), p. 125. The dual aspect of human experience as lived and as understood was a continual source of fascination to Melville. Professor J. Hillis Miller has privately pointed out to me this dual cognition in "Benito Cereno," for example.

13. Cf. Odysseus' weeping when he hears the minstrel at the court of King Alcinous tell the story of the attack on Troy and of his own part in it (Book 8, end). I am indebted to Professor Eric Weil for recalling this episode to me.

14. See St. Thomas, II *Sent.* 3, 1, 1.

15. See Luis Martinez Gomez, "From the Names of God to the Name of God: Nicholas of Cusa," *International Philosophical Quarterly,* Vol. 5 (1965), pp. 80-102 (translated by Aloysius C. Owen). Nicholas of Cusa was fascinatingly concerned with the names of God, especially in his *De Docta Ignorantia.*

16. The concern with names in the Pseudo-Dionysius probably echoes neoplatonic interests. I have not been able to pursue this matter very far, but see the discussion of divine names in Iamblichus, *De mysteriis Aegyptiorum,* VII 4-5.

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17. Cf. John Holloway, *Language and Intelligence* (London, 1951), p. 21. "The relation of naming is in fact both complex and puzzling; it is far from possessing such complete and convenient simplicity. . . . Indeed, it is doubtful if the relation between a proper name, and that object which it names, is really a relation of meaning at all."

18. Charles Dickens, *Hard Times,* Chapter 2.

19. Herman Melville, *Moby Dick,* Chapter 81.

20. The experience of the humanities that stands in opposition to the "science" of the humanities is itself double in aspect. Literary and phenomenological criticism can attempt through consciousness to attain the verbal experience of living, which is not the same as living itself. In other words, there are really three sides here: scientific or exterior cognition, phenomenological and lived cognition, the latter two of which are closely related as varieties of interior cognition. A phenomenological study of *Hamlet* is not the same as the viewing or reading of *Hamlet,* but it is closer to it than a scholarly study. I have not attempted to develop here this dual aspect of interior cognition.

    Many of the distinctions frequently given to characterize the humanities as a separate discipline do not seem valid to me. It is true, for example, that there is a large, playful, and aesthetic element in the humanities, as when documents or things are studied for their own sake. But these characteristics can be found in all scientific study, even if perhaps not to quite the same extent. Even the test of the practical or useful will not apply, for the humanities can also be very practical—in some forms of society more so than the physical sciences.

    I wish to thank my good friend Roy Harvey Pearce for some suggestions that I have used here.

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NORTHROP FRYE

The Critical Path: An Essay on the Social Context of Literary Criticism[1]

I

THE PHRASE "The Critical Path" is, I understand, a term in business administration, and was one that I began hearing extensively used during the preparations for the Montreal Expo in 1967. It associated itself in my mind with the closing sentences of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason,* where he says that dogmatism and skepticism have both had it as tenable philosophical positions, and that "the critical path is alone open." It also associated itself with a turning point in my own development. About twenty-five years ago, when still in middle life, I lost my way in the dark wood of Blake's prophecies, and looked around for some path that would get me out of there. There were many paths, some well trodden and equipped with signposts, but all pointing in what for me was the wrong direction. They directed me to the social conditions of Blake's time, to the history of the occult tradition, to psychological factors in Blake's mind, and other subjects quite valid in themselves. But my task was the specific problem of trying to crack Blake's symbolic code, and I had a feeling that the way to that led directly through literature itself. The critical path I wanted, therefore, was a theory of criticism which would, first, account for the major phenomena of literary experience, and, second, would lead to some view of the place of literature in civilization as a whole.

Following the bent that Blake had given me, I became particularly interested in two questions. One was: What is the total subject of study of which criticism forms a part? I rejected the easy answer: "Criticism is a subdivision of literature," because it seemed obvious to me that literature is not a subject of study at all apart from some aspect of criticism. There seemed to me two possible

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larger contexts of criticism: one, the unified criticism of all the arts, which did not (and does not yet) exist; the other, some larger study of verbal expression which had not yet been defined. The latter seemed more immediately promising: the former was the area of aesthetics, in which (at least at that time) relatively few technically competent literary critics appeared to be much interested. But there was a strong centrifugal drift from criticism toward social, philosophical or religious interests, which had set in at least as early as Coleridge. I viewed this with some suspicion, because it seemed to me that an unjustified sense of claustrophobia underlay it. A critic devoting himself wholly to literature is often tempted to feel that he can never be anything more than a second-class writer or thinker, because his work is based on the work of what almost by definition are greater men. I felt, then, that a theory of criticism was needed which would set the critic's activity in its proper light, and that once we had that, a critic's other interests would represent an expansion of criticism rather than an escape from it.

The other question was: How do we arrive at poetic meaning? This question was closely related to the other question of context. When I first began to write on critical theory, I was startled to realize how general was the agreement that criticism had no presuppositions of its own, but had to be "grounded" on some other subject. The disagreements were not over that, but over the question of what the proper subjects were that criticism ought to depend on. The older European philological basis, a very sound one, had already been discarded, in most North American universities, for a mixture of history and philosophy, evidently on the assumption that every work of literature is what Sir Walter Raleigh said *Paradise Lost* was, a monument to dead ideas. I myself was soon identified as one of the critics who took their assumptions from anthropology and psychology, then still widely regarded as the wrong subjects. I have always insisted that criticism cannot take presuppositions from elsewhere, which always means wrenching them out of their real context, and must work out its own. But mental habits are hard to break, especially bad habits, and, because I found the term "archetype" a useful one, I am still often called a Jungian critic, and classified with Miss Maud Bodkin, whose book I have read with interest, but whom, on the evidence of that book, I resemble about as closely as I resemble the late Sarah Bernhardt.

In the last generation, of which I am now speaking, the accepted critical procedure was to take a work of literature, let us say a poem

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for short, and treat it as a document to be related to some context outside literature. One of the most obvious of these documentary approaches was the biographical one, where the poem is taken to be a document illustrating something in the poet's life. The golden age of this approach was the nineteenth century, and its strongest proponent was Carlyle, for whom great poetry could only be the personal rhetoric of a great man. The model great man was Goethe, who, for Carlyle, was to be admired not so much for the quality of his poetry as for the number of things he had been able to do besides writing poetry. Of course no one denies the relevance of the poet's life to his work: doubts arise only when the sense of that relevance is carried to uncritical extremes. In the first place, there are variations in the degree of its relevance: it is more important for Byron than for Wordsworth, more important for D. H. Lawrence than for T. S. Eliot. Secondly, when we have no real knowledge of a poet's life at all, it is better to leave it alone than to invent a biography out of fancied allusions in the poetry, as nineteenth-century critics so often did with Shakespeare, and as many are still doing with the sonnets.

In these days, a biographical approach is likely to move from the manifest to the latent personal content of the poem, and from a biographical approach properly speaking to a psychological one, which at present means very largely a Freudian one. All documentary approaches to literature are allegorical approaches, and this fact becomes even more obvious when poems are taken to be allegories of Freudian repressions, unresolved conflicts or tensions between ego and id, or, for another school, of the Jungian process of individuation. A considerable amount of determinism enters at this stage. It still seems unquestionable to many critics that literature has its origin in psychological processes, and that it can be explained only in terms that are ultimately psychological terms. But what is true of allegorical poetry is equally true of allegorical criticism: in both fields allegory is a technique that calls for tact. When the whiteness of Moby Dick is explained as a Lockian *tabula rasa,* or Alice in Wonderland discussed in terms of her hypothetical toilet training, or Arnold's "Where ignorant armies clash by night" taken as a covert reference to the copulation of his parents, one is reminded of the exempla from natural history made by medieval preachers. The bee carries earth in its feet to ballast itself when it flies, and thereby reminds us of the Incarnation, when God took up an earthly form. The example is ingenious and entertaining, and only

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unsatisfying if one happens to be interested in bees. Naturally such practices have produced a reaction from critics who see the futility of trying to base their professional scholarly competence on an amateur enthusiasm for something else. But I do not think it helps any merely to write cautionary treatises urging critics that they should be careful not to do too much various things that they are not effectively doing at all.

In any case, there will always be critics, probably the great majority, for whom the ultimate source of a poem is not the individual poet at all, but rather the social situation from which the poet springs, and of which he is the spokesman and the medium. This takes us into the area of historical criticism. Here again no one can or should deny the relevance of literature to history, but here again the relation is an indirect one, more relevant to some poets than to others. The historical sub-culture known as the history of ideas is more consistently rewarding, for ideas, like poems, cannot exist until they are verbalized. Here the allegorizing tendency in all such criticism shows up very clearly.

Once more, some historical critics, like the biographical ones, will want to go from manifest to latent social content, from the historical context of the poem to its context in some unified overview of history. Of these enlarged historical perspectives, Marxism is today the most widely adopted, and perhaps inherently the most serious. Here again, as with psychological criticism, the determinism in the approach, which includes a determination to find the ultimate meaning of literature in something that is not literature, is unmistakable. At the time of which I am speaking, there was also a conservative Catholic determinism, strongly influenced by Eliot, which adopted, as the summit of Western cultural values, the medieval synthesis of the period of St. Thomas Aquinas, and looked down benignantly on everything that followed it as a kind of toboggan slide, rushing through nominalism, Protestantism, liberalism, subjective idealism, and so on to the solipsism in which the critic's non-Thomist contemporaries were assumed to be enclosed.

All these documentary approaches, even when correctly handled, are subject to at least three limitations, which every experienced scholar interested in them has to reckon with. In the first place, they do not account for the literary form of what they are discussing. Identifying Edward King and documenting Milton's attitude to the Church of England will throw no light on *Lycidas* as a pastoral elegy with specific Classical and Italian lines of ancestry. Secondly,

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they do not account for the poetic and metaphorical language of the literary work. Documentary criticism in general is based on the assumption that the literal or real meaning of a poem is not what it says as a poem, but is something to be expressed by a prose paraphrase derived from the poem. Thirdly, they do not account for the fact that the unique quality of a poet is often in a quite negative relation to the chosen context. To understand fully Blake's *Milton* and *Jerusalem* one needs to know something of his quarrel with Hayley and his sedition trial, but one also needs to be aware of the vast disproportion between these very minor events in a very quiet life and their apocalyptic transformation in the poems. Similarly, one may write a whole shelf of books about the life of Milton studied in connexion with the history of his time, and still fail to notice that Milton's greatness as a poet has a good deal to do with his profound and perverse misunderstanding of the history of his time.

By the time I began writing criticism, the so-called "new criticism" had established itself as a technique of explication. This was a rhetorical form of criticism, and from the beginning rhetoric has meant two things: the figuration of language and the persuasive powers of an orator. New criticism dealt with rhetoric in the former sense, and established a counterweight to the biographical approach which treated poetry as a personal rhetoric. The great merit of explicatory criticism was that it accepted poetic language as the basis for poetic meaning. On this basis, it built up a resistance to all "background" criticism that explained the literary in terms of the non-literary. At the same time, it deprived itself of the great strength of documentary criticism: the sense of context. It simply explicated one work after another, paying little attention to any larger structural principles connecting the different works explicated. The limitations of this approach soon became obvious, and most of the new critics sooner or later fell back on one of the established documentary contexts, generally the historical one, although they were regarded at first as anti-historical. One or two have even been Marxists, but in general the movement, at least in America, was anti-Marxist. Marxists had previously condemned a somewhat similar tendency in Russian criticism as "formalism," because they realized that if they began by conceding literary form as the basis for literary significance, the assumptions on which Marxist bureaucracies rationalized their censorship of the arts would be greatly weakened. They would logically have to end, in fact, in giving poets and novelists the same kind of freedom that they had reluctantly

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been compelled to grant to the physical scientists. More recently, my Toronto colleague Marshall McLuhan has placed an extreme and somewhat paradoxical formalism, expressed in the phrase "the medium is the message," within the context of a neo-Marxist determinism in which communications media play the same role that instruments of production do in more orthodox Marxism. In him the centrifugal tendency in criticism which I spoke of a moment ago has expanded into a new mosaic code. Professor McLuhan formed his views under the influence of the conservative wing of the new critical movement, and many traces of an earlier Thomist determinism can be found in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*.

It seemed to me that, after accepting the poetic form of a poem as its literal meaning, the next step was to look for some context for it within literature itself. And of course the most obvious context for a poem is the entire output of its author. Just as explication, by stressing the more objective aspect of rhetoric, had formed a corrective to the excesses of biographical criticism, so a study of a poet's whole work might form the basis of a kind of "psychological" criticism that would operate within literature, and so provide some balance for the kind that ends in the bosom of Freud. Poetry is, after all, a technique of communication: it engages the conscious part of the mind as well as the murkier areas, and what a poet succeeds in communicating to others is at least as important as what he fails to resolve for himself. One soon becomes aware that every poet has his own distinctive structure of imagery, which usually emerges even in his earliest work, and which does not and cannot essentially change. This larger context of the poem within its author's entire "mental landscape" (to use a phrase often employed in a different connexion) is assumed in all the best explication—Spitzer's, for example. I became aware of its importance myself, when working on Blake, as soon as I realized that Blake's special symbolic names and the like did form a genuine structure of poetic imagery and not, despite his use of the word, a "system," to which he was bound like an administrator to a computer. I got another lead here from Yeats's early essay on the philosophy of Shelley's poetry, for by "philosophy" Yeats really meant structure of imagery.

There was another difficulty with new criticism which was only a technical one, but still pointed to the necessity for a sense of context. Whenever we read anything there are two mental operations we perform, which succeed one another in time. First we follow the narrative movement in the act of reading, turning over the pages

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to get to the end. Afterwards, we can look at the work as a simultaneous unity and study its structure. This latter act is the critical response properly speaking: the ordinary reader seldom needs to bother with it. The chief material of rhetorical analysis consists of a study of the poetic "texture," and such a study plunges one into a complicated labyrinth of ambiguities, multiple meanings, recurring images, and echoes of both sound and sense. A full explication of a long and complex work which was based on the reading process could well become much longer, and more difficult to read, than the work itself. Such linear explications have some advantages as a teaching technique, but for publishing purposes it is more practicable to start with the second stage. This involves attaching the rhetorical analysis to a deductive framework derived from a study of the structure, and the context of that structure shows us where we should begin to look for our central images and ambiguities. The difficulty in transferring explication from the reading process to the study of structure has left some curious traces in new critical theory. One of them is again in McLuhan, who makes it the basis for a distinction between the "linear" demands of the printed media and the "simultaneous" impact of the electronic ones.

I was still not satisfied: I wanted a historical approach to literature, but an approach that would be or include a genuine history of literature, and not the assimilating of literature to some other kind of history. It was at this point that the immense importance of certain structural elements in the literary tradition, such as conventions, genres, and the recurring use of certain images or image-clusters, which I came to call archetypes, forced itself on me. T. S. Eliot had already spoken of tradition as a creative and informing power operating on the poet specifically as a craftsman, and not generally as a cultivated person. But neither he nor anyone else seemed to get to the point of identifying the factors of that tradition, of what it is that makes possible the creation of new works of literature out of earlier ones.

And yet convention, within literature, seemed to be a force even stronger than history. The difference between medieval poets using Courtly Love conventions in the London of Richard II and Cavalier poets using the same conventions in the London of Charles II is far less than the difference in social conditions between the two ages. I began to suspect that a poet's relation to poetry was much more like a scientist's relation to his science than was generally thought. Literature and science, of course, differ profoundly in the way in

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which science is able to absorb the work of predecessors in a steadily growing body of knowledge, whereas literature shows no such progressive tendencies. We shall perhaps understand this fact more clearly as we go on. Apart from that, the psychological processes involved seem much the same. The scientist cannot become a scientist until he immerses himself in his science, until he attaches his own thinking to the body of what is thought in his day about that science, until he becomes less a man thinking about his science than a kind of incarnation of that science thinking through him. What is true of science is true of all academic disciplines. No scholar, *qua* scholar, can think for himself or think at random: he can only expand an organic body of thought, add something logically related to what he or someone else has already thought. But this is precisely the way that poets have always talked about their relation to poetry: from Homer to Rimbaud, poets have invariably insisted that they were simply places where something new in literature was able to take its own shape. The new critics had resisted the background approach to criticism, but they had not destroyed the oratorical conception of poetry as a personal rhetoric.

From here it is clear that one has to take a final step. Criticism must develop a sense of history within literature to complement the historical criticism that relates literature to a historical background. Similarly, it must develop its own form of historical overview, on the basis of what is inside literature rather than outside it. Instead of fitting literature deterministically into a prefabricated scheme of history, the critic should see literature as, like a science, a unified, coherent and autonomous created form, historically conditioned but shaping its own history, not determined by any external historical process. This total body of literature can be studied through its larger structural principles, which I have just described as conventions, genres and recurring image-groups, or archetypes. When criticism develops a proper sense of the history of literature, the history of what is not literature does not cease to exist or to be relevant to the critic. Similarly, seeing literature as a single created form does not withdraw it from a social context: on the contrary, it becomes far easier to see what its place in civilization is. Criticism will always have two aspects, one turned toward the structure of literature as a whole and one turned toward the other cultural phenomena that form its environment. Together, they balance each other; when one is worked on to the exclusion of the other, the critical perspective goes out of focus. If criticism is in proper balance,

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the "centrifugal" tendency of critics to move from critical to larger social issues becomes more intelligible. Such a movement need not, and should not, be due to a dissatisfaction with the narrowness of criticism as a discipline, but should be simply the result of a sense of social context, a sense present in all critics from whom one is in the least likely to learn anything.

II

The conventions, genres and archetypes of literature do not simply appear: they must develop historically from origins, or perhaps from a common origin. In pursuing this line of thought, I have turned repeatedly to Vico, one of the very few thinkers to understand anything of the historical role of the poetic impulse in civilization as a whole. Vico describes how a society, in its earliest phase, sets up a framework of mythology, out of which all its verbal culture grows, including its literature. Vico's main interest is in the history of law, but it is not difficult to apply his principles to other verbal disciplines. Primitive verbal culture consists of, among other things, a group of stories. Some of these stories take on a central and canonical importance: they are believed to have really happened, or else to explain or recount something that is centrally important for a society's history, religion or social structure. These canonical stories are the ones we call myths: they are similar in literary form to folk tales and legends, but have a more specialized social function. Because of this function, myths tend to take root in a specific culture and to stick together to form a mythology, whereas folk tales lead a more nomadic existence, travelling over the world interchanging themes and motifs. This distinction is a fateful one for the critic, because the whole historical dimension of the study of literature is bound up in it. If the critic attends only to the similarity in form between myth and folk tale, he embarks on an oversimplified structuralism in which there is no real historical perspective at all. Once a mythology is formed, a *temenos* or magic circle is drawn around a culture, and literature develops historically within a limited orbit of language, reference, allusion, beliefs, transmitted and shared tradition.

As a culture develops, its mythology tends to become encyclopaedic, expanding into a total myth covering a society's view of its past, present and future, its relation to its gods and its neighbours,

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its traditions, its social and religious duties and its ultimate destiny. We naturally think of a mythology as a human cultural product, but few societies think of their mythologies at the beginning as something that they have themselves created. They think of them rather as a revelation given them from the gods, or their remote ancestors, or a period before time began. It is particularly law and religious ritual that are most frequently thought of as divinely revealed. A fully developed or encyclopaedic myth comprises everything that it most concerns its society to know, and I shall therefore speak of it as the myth of concern.

The myth of concern exists to hold society together, so far as words can help to do this. For it, truth and reality are not directly connected with reasoning or evidence, but are socially established. What is true, for concern, is what society does and believes in response to authority, and a belief, so far as a belief is verbalized, is a statement of willingness to participate in a myth of concern. The language of concern is, therefore, an expression of belief. In origin, a myth of concern is largely undifferentiated: it has its roots in religion, but religion has also at that stage the function of *religio*, the binding together of the community in common acts and assumptions. It is only later that the myth of concern tends to limit itself to a more specific religious area as other aspects of culture become more secularized. In this later stage it becomes more exclusively a myth of what Tillich calls ultimate concern, the myth of man's relation to other worlds, other beings, other lives, other dimensions of time and space. The myth of concern which European and American culture has inherited is, of course, the Judaeo-Christian myth as set out in the Bible, and as taught in the form of doctrine by the Christian Church. The encyclopaedic form of the Bible, stretching from creation to apocalypse, makes it particularly well fitted to provide a mythical framework for a culture, though supplemented in our literature by an extensive development of Classical mythology, which also takes on something of an encyclopaedic shape in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and elsewhere.

Vico was also the first, so far as I know, to indicate something of the crucial importance of a distinction which has been vigorously pursued by some scholars quite recently. This is the distinction between the oral or pre-literate culture in which the myth of concern normally begins, and the writing culture which succeeds it. An oral culture depends on memory, and consequently it also depends mainly on verse, the simplest and most memorable way of conven-

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tionalizing the rhythm of speech. In oral culture mythology and literature are almost coterminous: the teachers of the myth are poets, or people with skills akin to the poetic, who survive in legend or history as bards, prophets, religious teachers, or culture-heroes of various kinds. With a writing culture, prose develops, and the continuity of prose enables philosophy to take form, as a mode of thought articulated by logic and dialectic. Similarly, history detaches itself from epic, and gradually becomes the study of what actually occurred. Further, as a writing culture is usually a counting and measuring culture as well, scientific and mathematical procedures form part of the same change in mental attitude.

The mental habits brought in by a writing and measuring culture are very different from those of concern. Here, the driving forces binding society together have relaxed somewhat, and man may think of himself, not only as forming part of a community, but also as confronting an objective world or order of nature. Truth in this context becomes truth of correspondence, the alignment of a structure of words or numbers with a body of external phenomena. Such ideas as knowledge for its own sake, or Aristotle's axiom that all men by nature desire to know, are luxuries depending on the existence of written documents. It is clear that this approach to truth and reality tends to individualize a culture, to make the philosopher, the scientist, the poet, individually masters of a specialized craft. The normal tendency of truth of correspondence is non-mythical, appealing not directly to concern but to impersonal evidence and verification. The mental attitudes it develops, however, which include objectivity, suspension of judgment, tolerance, and respect for the individual, become social attitudes as well, and consolidate around a central relationship to society. The verbal expression of concern for these attitudes I shall call the myth of freedom. The myth of freedom is a part of the myth of concern, but is a part that stresses the importance of the non-mythical elements in culture, of the truths and realities that are studied rather than created, provided by nature rather than by human desire. It thus refers to the safeguarding of certain social values not directly connected with the myth of concern, such as the tolerance of opinion which dissents from it. It constitutes the "liberal" element in society, as the myth of concern constitutes the conservative one, and those who hold it are unlikely to form a much larger group than an educated minority. To form the community as a whole is not the function of the myth of freedom: it has to find its place in, and come to terms with, the society of which

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it forms part. Its relation to that society is symbiotic, though sometimes regarded, in times of deep conflict, as simply parasitic.

In the ancient world, Greek culture made the transition to writing, and to the mental habits of writing, with fair completeness, as far as its minority of cultural leaders was concerned. The expulsion of poets from Plato's republic was the sign that Greek culture was no longer to be confined by the idioms of the poets. The result is that the scientific, philosophical, mathematical and historical presuppositions of Western culture come mainly from the Greeks. Our whole liberal tradition in education, as the etymology of the word "academic" shows, is essentially of Greek origin. A parallel shift to writing and prose took place in Hebrew culture around the time of the Deuteronomic reform, which transformed a mass of legends and oracles into a sacred book written mainly in prose. But the prose of the Old Testament maintains a much closer link with the oral tradition. Philosophy, within the Biblical canon, still retains its primitive connexion with proverb and oracle: Biblical history is at no time clearly separable from legend or historical reminiscence. Whatever secular Hebrew culture developed did so outside the canon. The specific contribution of Hebrew and Biblical mythology to our own culture was in its concentration on a central myth of concern, and the rigorous subordination of all other cultural factors to it.

For Judaism, what is true and real is what God says and does; for Christianity, truth is ultimately truth of personality, specifically the personality of Christ. Within Christianity there has always been a feeling that whatever in one's faith is true owes its truth to being in the Bible, or to being taught by the Church on the basis of the Bible. In the First Epistle of John there is a verse setting forth the doctrine of the Trinity which New Testament scholars generally recognize to be a late insertion. The insertion is not simply a pious fraud: if one believes the doctrine of the Trinity, then, from the point of view of the myth of concern, the way to make it true is to get it into the Bible. Nor is the procedure any different from what had gone on in the holy book for centuries: we cannot trace any part of the Bible back to a time when it was not being edited, redacted, conflated, glossed, and expurgated.

When we ask what impelled Hebrew culture to develop its unique conception of a definitive sacred book, one of the answers clearly has to do with the fact that Israel was a defeated and subjected nation, with few intervals of military success and a long memory for them. Monotheism is an idea that seems to be suggested

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by the conception of a world empire: the first monotheist on record was an Egyptian Pharaoh, and among the most devout monotheists of the ancient world were the world-conquering Persians. The monotheism of the Hebrews, by contrast, was bound up with the conception of the one God as their God, united in a contract of blood with them, whose will would eventually re-establish their kingdom and overthrow the great empires of the earth. The Jewish conception of a "Day of Jehovah," which was adopted into Christianity as the Last Judgement, points to something very different from imperial monotheism. Hebrew monotheism differed from all similar creeds in being a socially and politically revolutionary belief, and this revolutionary quality was inherited by Christianity.

It is hard to overstate the importance for today of the fact that the Western myth of concern is in origin a revolutionary myth. I said that a religious myth of concern tends increasingly as it goes on to specialize in another world, and in proportion as it does so a more secular and political myth of concern arises to supplement it. This situation reached a crucial stage around the close of the eighteenth century, when the Christian monopoly of the Western myth of concern began to give way to a more pluralistic situation in which a number of new revolutionary political myths of concern shared the field with it. Of these, the most important were the myth of democracy and the revolutionary working-class myth centred on Marxism. The former, which drew from both Classical and Christian sources, was a myth of concern which attempted to incorporate a myth of freedom within itself; the latter was a more direct descendant of the original Judaeo-Christian revolutionary attitude. The link of continuity between Christianity and the revolutionary movements of our own time is much less obvious than the Greek ancestry of our academic and liberal attitudes, as every revolution forms itself in opposition to its predecessor. But the link is there: it is not easy to break out of the mental habits formed by a mythical framework, or what is often called tradition, and even if it is possible we must first know what that tradition is. Naturally, in the nineteenth century, and even earlier, there were many who insisted that the true myth of concern could only be found in a revived Christianity, and the production of such manifestoes has been a cultural heavy industry ever since. But not many of these—not even those of Kierkegaard, who was more aware of the kind of implications we are considering here than most—have been able or willing to recognize the revolutionary characteristics of the Christian myth.

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One of these characteristics is the belief in a unique historical revelation. This belief, which gives so many liberals so much difficulty with Christianity, is an essential part of a revolutionary attitude: a revolution starts then and there, not all over the place at different times. It begins with Jesus and not with the Pharisees or Essenes; with Marx and not with Owen or the Saint-Simonians. Along with the uniqueness goes the conception of a canon of essential and approved texts, and a clear drawing of lines against even the most neighborly of heresies. In fact, the attack on the heresy helps to define a revolutionary doctrine in a way that an attack on total opposition does not. Christianity defined itself, not by attacking unbelievers, but by attacking Arians or Gnostics and calling them unbelievers; Marxism defines itself, not by attacking capitalist imperialism, but by attacking Trotsky or Liu Shao-Chi and calling them agents of capitalist imperialism. Another characteristic is the resistance to any kind of "revisionism," or incorporating of other cultural elements into the thought of the revolutionary leadership. The revolutions within Christianity, notably the Protestant ones, usually professed to be a return to the pure gospel of their founder, and this must also be the professed aim of new Marxist party lines. There is even an ultra-Puritan movement in Marxism back to the early alienation essays of Marx, before social and institutional Marxism began. The anti-revisionist tendency is normally an anti-liberal tendency. Revolutions, naturally, are directed against some power-holding ascendancy, and liberals, from "enervate Origen," as Eliot calls him, to Erasmus, and from Erasmus to the politic liberals of our own day, are regularly taken by revolutionaries to be, consciously or unconsciously, spokesmen for the opposed establishment.

The conservative reaction to early Christianity was typical of conservative reactions to revolutionary movements. The earliest external reference to Christians, in Tacitus' *Annals*, speaks of them with a blistering contempt which is highly significant, coming as it does from a by no means weak or hysterical writer. Much later, the Emperor Marcus Aurelius complained that he had tried to get rid of the Christians by persecution, but had been unable to make much impression on them because of their *parataxis*, their military discipline. Even he did not recognize that the Christian Church had been duplicating the Roman authority within a power-structure which could go underground in time of persecution until the time came for it to emerge and take over. Eventually that time came, and then, of

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course, the cyclical movement which is inherent in the very word "revolution" began to operate.

In every structured society the ascendant class attempts to take over the myth of concern and make it, or an essential part of it, a rationalization of its ascendancy. In proportion as Christianity gained secular authority, its myth of concern tended to associate itself with the myths of the various ascendant classes as they succeeded one another. In the Middle Ages, the conception of a structure of authority, requiring protection from above and obedience from below, found its way into the religious myth as well as the social system. The connexion between Protestantism and the rise of the bourgeoisie has been considerably over-labored by historians and social scientists, but still in the nineteenth century Matthew Arnold was able, with some plausibility, to associate the "Hebraic" or Judaeo-Christian tradition with the mores of the Victorian middle class. Certainly the association of Christianity with the middle class did a good deal to popularize the Marxist conception of a proletarian or excluded-class myth of concern. Yet Christianity has always remained a revolutionary myth, never completely merging with any ascendant-class myth in the way that, apparently, Hinduism and Confucianism did in the Far East.

In the earlier Christian centuries, the dethroned "pagan" tradition began slowly to form a liberal opposition, modifying, relaxing, and expanding the revolutionary narrowness of the Christian myth of concern. Some of this was reflected in literature: we shall return to this later. Christianity, like most revolutionary movements, required from its most dedicated followers the extra energy that comes from sexual sublimation. The poets developed, mainly from Ovid, a convention of love poetry, which also often ended in sublimation, or even frustration, but also often did not, and in any case made it imaginatively clear that Eros was a mighty force to be reckoned with. Again, the Christian myth, by remaining so close to the oral tradition, had thrown a strong emphasis on the ear, on the hearing of the word, on the receptivity to authority that binds a society together. In the word "idolatry," and in its recurring iconoclasm, Christianity expressed its antagonism to the hypnotizing power of the external visible world. It was, again, a more liberal expansion of Christian culture that developed the visual arts, including the arts of the theatre, so much disliked by the more rigorous Christians, including Pascal and many of the Puritans. The growing realism and direct observation of experience and nature in Western

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art also helped to relax the Christian preoccupation with unifying society in a common bond of belief. The Christian teaching that there were no gods and nothing numinous in nature, that nature was a fellow-creature of man, and that the gods men had previously discovered in nature were all devils, reflects a certain fear of turning away from social concern to natural objects: the development of modern science, on the other hand, much as it owes to Christianity, also, from Copernicus onward, drew heavily from Platonic and other Classical world-views.

The central question of concern, what must we do to be saved? is much the same in all ages, but naturally the conceptions of salvation differ. There are two worlds for man: one is the environment of nature and existing society, which is presented to man as a datum and is first of all to be studied; and the other is the world he wants to live in, the civilization that he accepts as an ideal and tries to realize. For traditional Christianity, God alone is creative, and the creative power in man must follow divine models. God built the first city and planted the first garden; God in creating nature was the first artist; God designed the primary laws of mankind and revealed to him the true religion. For most radical myths of concern in our day, the only creative power in the situation comes from man himself, hence its truth or reality is connected with human desire, with what we want to see exist, and with human practical skill, with what we are able to make exist. Marx did not, so far as I know, speak of this created reality as myth: that association for revolutionary thought was made later, chiefly by Sorel. But the tendency of the radical outlook was certainly to associate the reality of desire and practical energy with human will and creative power, not with the acceptance of external or revealed authority. Philosophers, said Marx, have studied the world but not changed it, and for him it was time for the philosophical myth of freedom to be subordinated again to a new but wholly human and secular myth of concern.

III

In trying to see where the poet belongs in this dialectic of concern and freedom, I should like to turn to the two great "defences" of poetry in English literature, those by Sidney and Shelley. Both works are familiar, but in the present context they may show less familiar aspects. It is obvious that a defence of poetry, whoever writes it, contributes, at least potentially, to a critic's confession of

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faith. Defence implies attack: Sidney's essay is usually contrasted with the kind of anti-poetic statement often called "Puritan," such as Gosson's *School of Abuse* (although technically Gosson was not a Puritan and Sidney was), and Shelley takes off from his friend Peacock's satire, *The Four Ages of Poetry.*

In most Elizabethan criticism we find some reference to the poet as having been dispossessed from a greater heritage. Sidney stresses this theme less than many of his contemporaries, but still it is there, attached to the common Renaissance assumption that in all human achievements the greatest are the earliest. In a distant past, even before Homer, a period associated with such legendary names as Musaeus, Linus and Orpheus, along with Zoroaster in religion and Hermes Trismegistus in philosophy, the poet, we are told, was the lawgiver of society, the founder of civilization. This refers, as noted above, to the conditions of an oral or preliterate culture, in which the professional poet is, if not exactly the lawgiver, at least the educator, the man who knows. That is, he is the man who remembers, and consequently knows the traditional and proper formulas of knowledge. He knows the names of the gods, their genealogy and their dealings with men; the names of the kings and the tribal legends, the stories of battles won and enemies conquered, the popular wisdom of proverbs and the esoteric wisdom of oracles, the calendar and the seasons, the lucky and unlucky days and the phases of the moon, charms and spells, the right methods of sacrifice, appropriate prayers and formulas for greeting strangers. In short, he knows the kind of thing that we can still see in the poetry of Homer and Hesiod, in the heroic poetry of the North, in the popular ballads and folk epics still to be found in Slavic countries and in Central Asia.

The characteristics of oral poetry are familiar, the most familiar being the formulaic unit, the stock epithets and the metrical phrases that can be moved around at will in a poetic process which is always close to improvisation. An oral culture is necessarily a highly ritualized one, and oral poetry has strong affinities with magic. There is magic in the great roll-calls of names, like the Greek ships in Homer or the elemental spirits in Hesiod, in the carefully stereotyped descriptions of ritual and councils of war, in the oblique and riddling epithets like the Anglo-Saxon kenning, in the sententious reflexions that express the inevitable reactions to certain recurring human situations. Magic means secret wisdom, the keys to all knowledge, as becomes more obvious when the poet's repertory of legend

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expands into a vast interlocking epic cycle, which begins in turn to suggest the outlines of an encyclopaedic myth of concern. The Elizabethan critics (Sidney less than, for instance, Chapman) sensed a kind of encyclopaedic synthesis in Homer, and they had the same kind of sentimental admiration for it that many people in our day have had for the cultural synthesis of the Middle Ages. The ideal of universal knowledge achieved in and through poetry has continued to haunt poets and critics ever since.

Oral formulaic poetry has a driving power behind it that is very hard to recapture in individually conceived and written poetry. The sinewy strength of Homer is the despair of imitators and translators alike: the style is neither lofty nor familiar, neither naive nor ingenious, but passes beyond all such distinctions. We can get a clearer idea of the effect of such poetry, perhaps, from another formulaic art, the music of the high Baroque. In an intensely formulaic composer, such as Vivaldi, the same scale and chord passages, the same harmonic and melodic progressions, the same cadences, appear over and over again, yet the effect is not monotony but the release of a self-propelled energy. One of the keenest sources of pleasure in listening to poetry or music is the fulfilling of a *general* expectation, of a sort that is possible only in highly conventionalized art. If a particular expectation is being fulfilled, when we know exactly what is going to be said, as in listening to something very familiar, our attention is relaxed, and what we are participating in tends to become either a ritual or a bore, or possibly both. If we have no idea what is coming next, our attention is tense and subject to fatigue. The intermediate area, where we do not know what Pope will say but do know that he will say it in a beautifully turned couplet, where we do not know in a detective story who murdered X but do know that somebody did, is the area of closest unity between poet and audience.

So far as it is a technique, Homer's energy can be matched by the later poets of a writing culture, but the kind of general expectation he raises is based on something that hardly can be. This is the total empathy between poet and audience which arises when the poet is neither the teacher of his audience nor a spokesman for them, but both at once. Such a poet needs to make no moral judgements, for the standards implied are already shared. We cannot even call him a conservative, for that is still a partisian term, and in every judgement or reflective statement he does make he is formulating his hearer's thought as well as his own.

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In oral culture the continuity of verse forms an odd contrast to the discontinuity of prose. Continuous prose is based, not on the physical pulsation of verse, but on a conceptual or semantic rhythm which is much more difficult and sophisticated. The primitive prose of concern, easily illustrated from the Bible, expresses itself in a discontinuous sequence of aphorisms, like the proverbs which are the vehicle of popular philosophy, or oracular sayings of "wise men," the commandments of authoritative teachers of the myth of concern, or the brief narratives in the lives of such teachers that lead up to some crucial saying or action. The effect of the discontinuity is to suggest that the statements are existential, and have to be absorbed into the consciousness one at a time, instead of being linked with each other by argument. Oracular prose writers from Heraclitus to Marshall McLuhan have exploited the sense of extra profundity that comes from leaving more time and space and less sequential connexion at the end of a sentence. In Sidney's day Bacon was experimenting, in his essays, with a form of oracular concerned prose derived from the study of rhetoric and designed to "come home to men's business and bosoms," as he put it. In the earliest essays particularly, each sentence is really a paragraph in itself. In contrast, such metaphors as "the pursuit of truth wherever it may lead" show how closely associated the truth of correspondence is with the technique of continuous prose writing.

Of course by Sidney's time the mental habits of a writing culture were in the ascendant, and hence the language of prose and reason had come to be regarded as the primary verbal expression of reality. This assumption is so firmly established that Sidney raises it only by implication. It is accepted that no poet can be regarded as having, in religion, the kind of authority that the theologian would have; and in history and morals too the language of poetry falls short of the language of what is considered literal truth. Many people in Sidney's day and later were obsessed with the values of a writing culture. Religion for most of them was derived from a book; it was spiritually dangerous to be illiterate, yet the religion had to be understood from the book in the plainest possible terms. Hence the attitude of such pamphleteers as Gosson, who demanded to know why Plato was not right, and why the poets with their outworn modes of thought and their hankering for the fabulous should still have a claim on our attention.

Gosson is something of a straw man in Sidney, if he is there at all, and the sense of social threat is not very oppressive. The general

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critical position of Sidney is contained within the same Christian framework of assumptions as that of the detractors of poetry. For Sidney, the ultimate aim of education, in the broadest sense, is the reform of the will, which is born in sin and headed the wrong way. Truth, by itself, cannot turn the will, but poetry in alliance with truth, using the vividness and the emotional resonance peculiar to it, may move the feelings to align themselves with the intelligence, and so help to get the will moving. Thus the function of poetry is rhetorical or persuasive. When writing techniques develop in society, the central oral figure becomes the orator, and for Sidney the poet's training is very similar to the orator's rhetorical training, as laid down by Cicero and Quintillian. Rhetoric, said Aristotle, is an *antistrophos*, the answering chorus, of truth; and whatever genuine social function the poet has depends on the consonance between his rhetoric and the rational disciplines, with their more exact relation to reality. The same conception of poetry as an emotional support is applied to social action, more particularly military courage, where poetry is discovered to be, not a corrupter of courage, but "the companion of camps."

In countering the attack on poetry as "fabulous," Sidney follows the line of argument which had also descended from Aristotle, that the truthful statement is the specific and particular statement. Poetry withdraws from particular statements: the poet never affirms or denies, and thus is able to combine the example of the historian with the precept of the moral philosopher. As compared with the historian, the poet gives us not the existential but the recurring or essential event: as compared with the moralist, he tells us not the essential but the existential truth, the kind of truth that can only be presented through illustration or parable. One principle emerging here, of which Sidney is as yet still imperfectly aware, is a distinction between what the poet says and what he illustrates or shows forth. What he says is of limited importance: whatever it is other forms of verbal expression say it more accurately. He is, of course, greatly prized for his capacity to make sententious statements, of the kind that readers and schoolboys copied out in their commonplace books. But the more admirable the sentence, the more it is an echo of what we already know in a different way. What is distinctive about poetry is the poet's power of illustration, a power which is partly an ability to popularize and make more accessible the truths of revelation and reason. Hence the importance of the tag ***ut pictura poesis:*** poetry is a speaking picture. Gerard Manley

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Hopkins draws a distinction between a poet's "overthought," or explicit meaning, and his "underthought," or texture of images and metaphors. But in a writing culture a poet's underthought, his metaphorical or pictured meaning, tends to become the more important thought, and to some degree it even separates itself from the explicit statement.

The critical situation which Sidney is implicitly accepting may be stated something like this: in a writing culture the norms of meaning are established by the non-literary writers. It is the discursive prose writers who really mean what they say, and align their words clearly with the facts or propositions they are conveying. Compared with them, the poet's meaning is indirect, or ironic, as we should say now. When we try to grasp a poem's meaning, we begin with the meaning which the poem has in common with non-literary writing. We call this the literal meaning, though it is actually an allegorical meaning, something that relates the poem to something outside poetry. What the poem means apart from this is largely an emotional meaning, conveyed through various devices of rhetorical embellishment. For criticism based on this aspect of meaning, poems considered as content are essentially documents or records, whether of ideas or of the poet's experience: considered as forms they are products of rhetorical expertise. In either case the critic's function is primarily judicial or evaluative, concerned with the worth of what the poet is saying and with his success in saying it.

When we look at Shakespeare, we realize that Elizabethan culture is still very largely oral, and that the existence of a poetic theatre is evidence of the fact. In Shakespeare we see a good deal of the poet's original oral educating function still going on, most obviously in the histories. Shakespeare also shows the identification with the audience's attitude that the oral poet has. On the level of explicit statement, or what the play appears to be saying, he seems willing to accept the assumption, or implication, that Henry V was a glorious conqueror and Joan of Arc a wicked witch, that Shylock is typical of Jews and Judaism, that peasants are to be seen through the eyes of the gentry, that the recognized sovereign is the Lord's anointed and can cure diseases in virtue of being so, and many other things that the modern critic passes over in embarrassed silence. With Shakespeare we are still many centuries removed from T. S. Eliot's comparison of the explicit meaning of a poem to a piece of meat that a burglar throws to a watchdog to keep him quiet. But

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there is clearly something in the uncritical social postulates of Shakespeare that has to do with soothing popular anxieties and keeping a vigilant and by no means unintelligent censorship from getting stirred up. I am not of course speaking of a conscious policy on Shakespeare's part: I am merely applying to him a principle which extends to all poetry. Questionable or dated social attitudes, as expressed in what appears to be the surface meaning, do not affect the real meaning of poetry, which is conveyed through a structure of imagery and action.

The Elizabethan critics were less contradictory than they may at first seem to be in saying, on the one hand, that the poet popularizes the rational disciplines, sugar-coats the pill, provides instruction for the simple, and on the other hand that great poetry is a treasure trove of esoteric wisdom which poets hid in parables "lest by profane wits it should be abused," as Sidney says. Both these views of poetry can be understood through the same axiom of *ut pictura poesis*. Spenser, for instance, attempted in *The Faerie Queene* "a continued allegory or dark conceit" which would return proportionate rewards for a good deal of work. At the same time it is clear that his friend Gabriel Harvey regarded the poem, with its use of magic, medieval romance, the fairy world, the folk play of St. George, and in general of what he called "Hobgoblin run away with the garland from Apollo," as a concession to the simpler tastes in Spenser's audience.

The more completely the techniques of writing and the mental disciplines they create pervade a community, the more difficult it is for the poet to retain his traditional oral functions. Prose becomes fully mature and in command of its characteristic powers, and thereby begins to break away from poetry, which has nothing like its capacity for conceptual expression, and has a limited tolerance for the abstract language which is now becoming even the ordinary language of educated people. Ambiguity, which simply means bad or incompetent writing in any logical or descriptive context, is a structural principle of poetry. In proportion as scientific and philosophical pictures of the world develop, the starkly primitive nature of poetic thought stands out more clearly. Poetry being founded, not in the sense of an objective order of nature, but in the sense of social concern, its approach to nature is intensely constructive and associational. Poetry attempts to unite the physical environment to man through the most primitive of categories, the categories of analogy and identity, simile and metaphor, which

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the poet shares with the lunatic and the lover, and which are essentially the categories of magic. The figure of the magician, who, like Orpheus, can charm the trees by his song is a figure of the poet as well. The function of magic, said Pico della Mirandola, is to "marry the world" (*maritare mundum*), and this naive anthropomorphic image remains close to the centre of all poetic metaphor. But magic, as soon as writing develops, no longer seems contemporary with the rest of thought.

Such are some of the paradoxes that Peacock deals with in his brilliant satire *The Four Ages of Poetry,* perhaps the nearest to Vico of any piece of writing in English literature. According to Peacock, poetry began in primitive times as "the mental rattle that awakened the attention of intellect in the infancy of civil society." The chief form of primitive poetry was, Peacock says, panegyric, which points to the identification of the poet with his community that we find in oral cultures. Poetry has its greatest flowering, or golden age, in the times immediately following, where habits of thought are still close to the primitive. But as civilization develops, Plato's prophecy becomes fulfilled, and the poet becomes more and more of an atavistic survival. "A poet in our times is a semi-barbarian in a civilized community. He lives in the days that are past. His ideas, thoughts, feelings, associations, are all with barbarous manners, obsolete customs, and exploded superstitions. The march of his intellect is like that of a crab, backward."

Peacock's essay is in part a comment on the rise of the Romantic movement, particularly on such features as its interest in the ballad and other forms of primitive verbal culture, its use of superstition and magic as poetic imagery, its withdrawal from urban culture and its tendency to seek its subjects in the simplest kinds of rural life. But everything that Peacock says about the age of Wordsworth and Coleridge applies far more to the age of D. H. Lawrence and Ezra Pound. He illustrates a stage of poetry in which the poet has lost the traditional function inherited from pre-literate days, and as a result has become separated from society. Yet the very isolation of the modern poet may indicate a turning point in literary history: at any rate, this is the principle on which Shelley's reply to Peacock is based. In Shelley the poetic or mythical habit of mind, however primitive, is seen as coming back into society, insisting on being recognized for itself and on being accorded some degree of autonomy and independence from the logical habit of mind.

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We are first made aware, however, of the decline of the sense of the social relevance of poetry since Sidney's time, except insofar as it has become assimilated to the mental outlook of a writing culture. Sidney's case for the poet depends on a body of generally accepted social ideas and values. As society becomes more confident about these values, the help of the poet in publicizing them becomes less essential, and his role more curtailed. For Sidney the poet is, for example, potentially a religious influence. Sidney accepts the Christian conception of two levels of nature, an upper level of human nature as God originally planned it, man's unfallen state, and a lower level of physical nature which is theologically "fallen." When Sidney says that poetry develops a second nature, he is thinking of the power of the poet to present the ideal of the unfallen state in its most vivid possible form, as a speaking picture. But in a later age, under Boileau's influence, the mysteries of religion are thought to be too high for the poet's ornamentation: on the other hand, the puerilities of heathen mythology are too low, and the poet should outgrow his hankering for them. Of the traditional qualities of oral poetry, the one that chiefly survives, in the age of Pope, is the sententious, the capacity to formulate "What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed." The high value set on this aspect of poetry continues well into Victorian times. But otherwise the elements that make Homer the cornerstone of our poetic tradition are precisely the elements that come to be most despised. Catalogues and lists and mnemonic verses of the "Thirty days hath September" type, quoted by Coleridge, are now regarded as poetry's lowest achievement: the formulaic unit becomes the cliché; the reverence for convention, of doing things because this is the way they are done, gives place to a law of copyright and a cult of uniqueness.

The poet's role of telling his society what his society should know is even more drastically inverted. In this connexion Peacock makes the comment:

> As to that small portion of our contemporary poetry . . . which, for want of a better name, may be called ethical, the most distinguished portion of it, consisting merely of querulous, egotistical rhapsodies, to express the writer's high dissatisfaction with the world and every thing in it, serves only to confirm what has been said of the semi-barbarous character of poets, who from singing dithyrambics and "Io Triumphe," while society was savage, grow rabid, and out of their element, as it becomes polished and enlightened.

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The most intellectually tolerant of critics, studying the ideas or opinions of Yeats, D. H. Lawrence, Ezra Pound, Robert Graves, or Wyndham Lewis, is bound to be puzzled, even distressed, by the high proportion of freakish and obscurantist views he finds and the lack of contact they show with whatever the ideas are that actually do hold society together. In the twentieth century an important and significant writer may be reactionary or superstitious: the one thing apparently that he cannot be is a spokesman of ordinary social values. The popular poems of our day are usually poems of explicit statement, continuing the sententious tradition, but such poems seem as a rule to be out of touch with the real poetic idioms of their times. Recently, in an interviewing program on the Canadian radio, a Toronto hippie remarked that the world would have no problems left if everyone would only read Kipling's "If" and live by it. One feels that in our day a remark of that kind could be attached only to a substandard poem. Those who express the ideas and symbols that hold society together are not the poets; they are not even the orators who succeeded them, so much as men of action with a power over the sententious utterance which operates mainly outside literature, and who usually arise in a revolutionary situation. Such men of action include Jefferson, and later Lincoln, in America, and the great Marxist leaders, Lenin and Mao. The "thoughts" of Mao in particular seem to have succeeded in putting Marxism into the aphoristic prose of concern, something that Marx himself, after the Communist Manifesto, hardly attempted except for the Theses on Feuerbach.

In spite of the close affinity between metaphor and magic, one might have thought that, as the authority of science established itself, poets would become the heralds of science, as they had earlier been the heralds of religion. Many great poets, such as Dante, had in fact absorbed and used most of the essential science of their day. But after about Newton's time it became increasingly clear that most really important poets were not going to make much more than a random and occasional use of imagery derived from science, or even from technology. Many poets from the eighteenth century onward have taken a keen and well informed interest in science, but it is true even of Shelley and Goethe that their best poetry does not really absorb scientific conceptions and vocabularies and express them with full poetic resonance. Cosmological and speculative themes have been central to poetry throughout its history; versified science has always been eccentric

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to it. What had attracted earlier poets to the science contemporary with them was clearly a certain schematic and mythical quality in it, associations of seven planets with seven metals and the like, which science itself had outgrown. This schematic quality survived only in a kind of intellectual underground inhabited by occultists, theosophists, mystagogues and scryers, yet curiously enough this was where many poets turned for intellectual support. Further, as we see in Yeats, such interests are so triumphantly vindicated in the poetry itself that it seems clear that they are connected with the actual language of poetry, and are not simply a removable obstacle to appreciating it. The relation of poetry to religion has been much closer, and many modern poets have been most eloquent in their support of the Christian religion. One wonders whether that may not be connected with the fact that Christianity is more primitive in its mythology than Judaism or Marxism or the highly intellectualized versions of Oriental religions that reach us.

Shelley begins his answer to Peacock by neatly inverting the hierarchy of values implied in Sidney. Sidney is concerned to show that poetry is a genuine instrument of education, along with religion, morality and law, but their claim to be educational is prior and unquestioned. Shelley puts all the discursive disciplines into an inferior group of "analytic" operations of reason. They are aggressive; they think of ideas as weapons; they seek the irrefutable argument, which keeps eluding them because all arguments are theses, and theses are half-truths implying their own opposites. Some of the discursive writers are defenders of the social status quo: not only do they fail to defend it, but they exasperate and embitter a society in which the rich get richer and the poor poorer. There are also liberal and radical discursive writers: they are on Shelley's side and he approves of them, but being only the other half of the argumentative disciplines, the amount of good they can do is limited. The works of imagination, by contrast, cannot be refuted: poetry is the dialectic of love, which treats everything it encounters as another form of itself, and never attacks, only absorbs.

This view of poetry cannot be affected by the notion that Peacock pretends to accept, that mankind progresses through reason to greater enlightenment, and that poetry, like the less interesting types of religion, is committed to the values of an outworn past. The metaphor of creation, if it is a metaphor, is not

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new with the Romantics, and most of the better Elizabethan critics understood what is meant by "creative" very well. But in Sidney's day it was accepted that the models of creation were established by God: for Shelley, man had made his own civilization and is responsible for it, and at the centre of his creation are the poets, whose work provides the models of human society. Thus poetry once again, as in primitive times, becomes mythopoeic, but this time its myths embody and express man's creation of his own culture, and not his reception of it from a divine source.

Shelley says that poetry is "that to which all science must be referred." There is a reality out there, a reality which is given and has in itself no moral significance, which science studies, and there is the reality which does not exist to begin with, but is brought into being through a certain kind of creative activity. This latter kind of created reality does have moral significance, and is in fact what we have been calling the myth of concern: the statement of questions and answers about man's destiny and situation, the meaning of his life and death, his relation to past and future, to God and to society. The articulating of concern cannot base itself on science or any discursive discipline, nor can it any longer echo or support what they say. The mythical confronts the logical, and assimilates it to the concerns of human existence.

Consequently it is no good attaching a pejorative meaning to the word "primitive." Poetry which is not primitive is of no use to anybody: every genuine work of the imagination comes out of the most primitive depths of human concern. I say "depths" because of all the subterranean and oracular imagery in Shelley. Poetry for him comes from an area which, though superior to consciousness, is metaphorically hidden and underneath, in what we now call the subconscious. Because this oracular power has assumed the authority formerly ascribed to God's revelation, it is surrounded with a good deal of resonant rhetoric about "that imperial faculty, whose throne is curtained within the invisible nature of man." Such a formulation may tend, in later Romantics, to lead to a certain amount of displaced racism and an unhealthy emphasis on the immense difference between those few who are born geniuses and the rest of us mediocrities. The implications in Shelley, despite the rhetoric, are more interesting.

Shelley says that our perception of given reality, the world out there, tends to become habitual, hence a pernicious mental habit develops of regarding the unchanging as the unchangeable, and of

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assimilating human life to a conception of predictable order. But poetry, says Shelley, "creates anew the universe, after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration." Hence the poetic and the revolutionary impulses are interdependent. No genuine change in society can take place except through realizing that the imagination, which conceives the form of society, is the source of the power of change.

Every great poem is a product of its time, and is consequently subject to the anxieties of its time. It is an implicit part of Shelley's argument that an authentic reading of poetry reads it by its imaginative "underthought" and not by its explicit conformity to contemporary prejudice, or what he calls, in connexion with Calderon, "the rigidly-defined and ever-repeated idealisms of a distorted superstition." If, for instance, we read Dante's *Inferno* as a poem conforming to or coming to terms with anxieties about a life of unending torment after death awaiting most of those who do not make an acceptable deal with the Church, then, from Shelley's normal point of view, writing such a poem would be an act of treachery to the human race far lower than anything done by Dante's three traitors, Brutus, Cassius, and Judas Iscariot, all of whom must have acted from better motives. But, of course, we read the *Inferno* through its imagery and action, as a representation of the actual life of man. Reading all poems in terms of their presented or illustrated meaning, we come to realize that there are no dead ideas in literature. The imagination operates in a counter-historical direction—it redeems time, to use a phrase which is Shelleyan as well as Biblical, if in a different context—and literature exists totally in the present tense as a total form of verbal imagination. Shelley speaks of this total form as "that great poem, which all poets, like the co-operating thoughts of one great mind, have built up since the beginning of the world."

We are brought back here to our original point about the insufficiency of allegorical or external meaning, which aligns poetry to something outside itself, when considered to be the whole work of criticism. Meaning is centripetal as well as centrifugal: words in a poem are to be understood by their function in that poem as well as by their conventional or dictionary meanings, hence the importance of explicatory criticism. But the words used in a poem are used in other poems as well as in non-literary structures, and not only words but images and metaphors and rhythmical patterns and conventions and genres. This leads to a conception of poetic

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meaning which is not allegorical, taking us outside literature, but archetypal, placing the poem in its literary context, and completing our understanding of its structure by relating it to the rest of our literary experience. The lightning flash of Shelley's phrase illuminates the contemporary critic's *pons asinorum*, the bridge leading from the secure routines of explication and research over to the other shore of criticism.

Ever since Plato the question has been raised: in what sense does the poet know what he is talking about? The poet seems to have some educational function without being himself necessarily an educator. He knows what he is doing, but *qua* poet can say nothing beyond his poem. Hence the need for the educational aspect of his function to be taken over by someone else. In oral days he had only the rhapsode, who, as Socrates demonstrates in the *Ion*, really knows nothing at all. With the rise of writing and more sequential forms of thinking the critic appears as the social complement of the poet. In Sidney's view of poetry the critic retains his traditional role as judge, as a spokesman for society's response to poetry. But Shelley's conception of poetry makes the critic rather a student of mythology. The whole subject of which criticism forms part, then, on this view, is the study of how society produces, responds to, and uses its myths, or structures of concern, in which the poetic structures are central. This subject has not yet been defined, but it would embrace large segments of psychology, anthropology, philosophy, history, and comparative religion as well as criticism.

We can see from Sidney's defence, then, how literature adapts itself to the canons of a writing culture by withdrawing from specific statements, and how it marks out its own field on the boundaries of history and philosophy. We can also see how the documentary or "background" interests of literary criticism have originated. We can see too that poets do not forget their original function as teachers of the myth of concern, many traces of which still linger in the Bible, and that for them it is still true that their world is golden, and nature's only brazen, in Sidney's phrase. That is, their place is with the truth or reality that are created out of nature, not with the truth or reality that are presented by nature and studied. Here and there, as in Sidney's appreciation of the ballad of Chevy Chase, or the famous phrase about the poet coming to us "with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner," we are reminded that there is always something primitive and conservative about poetry, that the poet's world

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is built out of a flat earth with a rising and setting sun, with four elements and an animate nature, the concrete existential world of emotions and sensations and fancies and transforming memories and dreams. Truth of correspondence grows and progresses, and each age of science stands on the shoulders of its predecessors. But truth of concern knows nothing of progress, and poetry keeps revolving around its canon of classics, as religion does around its canon of sacred texts. Sidney is riding on the crest of the humanist revolution, but humanism, with its cult of Classical authority and its contempt for the "jargon" of technical philosophy, had its reactionary as well as its liberal side.

The lurking primitiveness of poetry is suggested by only a few hints in Sidney's urbane apologetic, but after Peacock the "Luddite" tendencies of the literary attitude, as Sir Charles Snow calls them, come more into the open. For Shelley, religion as a creed and a social institution is a projected, and consequently a perverted, creation of the human imagination. The revolutionary element in the creation of literature, for Shelley, is connected essentially with the recovery by the imagination of what it has projected. But this act of imaginative recovery also separates the created reality of poetry from the presented reality of the objective world. Not only does poetry create for us "a being within our being," but it also "defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions." An imaginative revolution is envisaged here that goes far beyond political ones. Marxism returned to the view of Sidney, that poetry's social function is to echo and support the more specific approaches to truth made by the discursive verbal disciplines. The bourgeois culture of Shelley's day took the same view, in a more naive form. Hence Shelley's phrase "unacknowledged legislators." The poet's function is still his primitive oral function of defining and illustrating the concerns of the society that man is producing, but this fact is not generally realized. It is not realized partly because the language of poetry is still thought of as a rhetorical and sub-logical language: the principles of mythical language are still largely unknown.

IV

The modern form of the conceptions of concern and freedom may be expressed somewhat as follows. Man lives in two worlds. There is the world he is actually in, the world of nature or his ob-

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jective environment, and there is the world he wants to live in, the civilization he is trying to build or maintain out of his environment, a world rooted in the conception of art, as the environment is rooted in the conception of nature. For the objective world he develops a logical language of fact, reason and verification; for the potentially created world he develops a mythical language of hope, desire, belief, fantasy and construction. Both languages are based on the arts, and the verbal arts are prominent in both, but the metaphorical language of poetry is essentially a mythical and not a logical language. It speaks the language of concern, of the beliefs and wishes that hold society together, not the language that describes the environment, however descriptive it may sometimes become as a technical *tour de force.*

Naturally, the study of man's environment cannot be confined to the non-human environment: human society, in the present as in the past, is an objective fact too. Sooner or later, therefore, the scientific spirit and the search for truth of correspondence are going to invade the structures of concern themselves, studying human mythology in the same spirit that they study nature. This collision between concern and freedom may well be the most important type of what is now called "culture shock" that we have. In weak or frightened minds such a collision produces immediate panic, followed by elaborate defensive reactions. Efforts to bring the spirit of enquiry into the Christian religion have been met with such responses as (to give a relatively mild example): "If you destroy our faith with your rational and analytical questions, what will you put in its place?" Marxist atheologians similarly insist that, as everybody exists in a specific social context, there is no such thing as complete detachment from a social attitude, and that consequently all enquiry is rooted in a social attitude which must be either revolutionary, and so in agreement with them, or counter-revolutionary. One still often hears the argument among student militants that because complete objectivity is impossible, differences in degree of objectivity are not important. In my own field, I have often observed how the critical study of literature meets with resistance and guilt feelings based on a fear that if a professional knowledge of literature involves a deeper understanding of it than casual readers possess, it will build up some kind of undemocratic elite. The resistance is especially strong when the critic holds, as I do, that criticism cannot be directed toward value-judgments, because every attempt to do this leads to ranking literary works in some

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irrelevant moral hierarchy. Such clichés as "it kills poetry to analyze it"; "literature is life, not a critic's chess game," etc., etc., are typical of the anxieties thrown up by immature concern.

Others meet the collision from the opposite side, with a naive rationalism which expects that before long all myths of concern will be outgrown and only the appeal to reason and evidence and experiment will be taken seriously. It will, I hope, become clear in the course of this essay why I consider such a view entirely impossible. When we see a concern myth in process of formation, such as the current "black" myth, it is an over-simplified view that regards fidelity to historical or sociological fact the only important moral principle involved. It seems to be one of the unavoidable responsibilities of educated people to show by example that beliefs may be held and examined at the same time. The growth of non-mythical knowledge tends to eliminate the incredible from belief, and helps to shape the myth of concern according to the outlines of what experience finds possible and vision desirable. But the growth of knowledge cannot in itself provide us with the social vision which will suggest what we should do with our knowledge.

In its "pure" form, concern is expressed by an unquestioning belief that cares little for evidence or reason, or, at least, does not depend on them. But as the sense of the importance of truth of correspondence makes itself felt, concern attempts to absorb this sense by constructing a deductive attitude to experience. Thus as Christianity developed, it rationalized itself, asserting that it possessed the truth of correspondence as well, and was true by the tests of reason and historical evidence. In doing this its faith, or central body of verbally articulated concern, became a set of major premises for a deductive rational structure provided by theology, from which in turn principles of philosophy and science were, at least theoretically, to be deduced. Marxism is still struggling with a similar deductive scholasticism, maintaining that its principles are "scientific," that is, valid major premises of science. In proportion as this deductive synthesis breaks down, and individual sciences become autonomous, what we have called the myth of freedom begins to be effective, the feeling that tolerance and suspended judgement are good things in themselves and are not merely expedient. Christianity began to enter this phase with the humanist movement of the late fifteenth century, but the ferocity of the conflict between Catholic and Protestant versions of the Christian myth of concern delayed the development of a myth of freedom for centuries. Marx-

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ism appears to be entering the same phase in the smaller European countries, with similar obscurantist conflicts looming on the horizon.

In the democracies, too, a strong hankering for an encyclopaedic synthesis of thought, which would have a solidly established body of scientific facts and laws as its foundation and the premises of belief and hope as its superstructure, keeps recurring in every generation. In the nineteenth century, such ambitions gave a strong cosmological slant to philosophy: in fact, constructing encyclopaedic "systems," or verbal cathedrals of knowledge and faith, was often regarded as philosophy's primary task. In the twentieth century it has become more widely accepted that mythical and logical languages are distinct languages, connected mainly by analogy. (I use the term "language" in a metaphorical sense, not in a linguistically precise one.) Thus if a philosophical or social thinker bases his structure on the conception of evolution, what he is working with is not really the same principle as the biological hypothesis of evolution, but is rather a mythical analogy of that hypothesis. The vision of things as they could be certainly has to depend on the vision of things as they are. But what is between them is not so much a point of contact as an existential gap, a revolutionary and transforming act of choice. The beliefs we hold and the kind of society we try to construct are chosen from infinite possibilities, and the notion that our choices are inevitably connected with things as they are, whether through the mind of God or the constitution of nature, always turns out to be an illusion of habit.

I said above that as historical Christianity gained power in a writing culture, it took on the mental attitudes of that culture, and that no Christian poet, not even Dante or Milton, could be given the kind of authority that the theologian possessed. Classical mythology therefore provided some advantages for the poets because it belonged to imagination rather than directly to faith. Hence literature, especially the more explicitly mythopoeic literature, tended increasingly to go over to the Classical and liberal opposition, as the kind of imaginative commitment that Classical imagery demanded was very like the suspension of judgement that is so important for liberalism. By the time of the Romantic movement this tendency was so marked that several Romantic poets, including Shelley and many of the Germans, began to suggest that our real myth of concern was of Classical rather than Christian origin. The culmination of this tendency was Nietzsche and his opposition of

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Christ and Dionysus; but more significant, for our present purposes, is its development by Matthew Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy*. I am writing in the centenary year of that book (1969), and nobody can be writing on such a subject as mine in this year without being aware that the confrontation of culture and anarchy has taken a very different form from the one that Arnold envisaged.

According to Arnold, the "Hebraic" revolutionary myth of concern was losing its impetus, running into the desert sands of bourgeois morality. Other revolutionary movements were beginning to take shape. One was a cult of "doing as one likes," the other a working-class social movement that was making ominous noises after the passing of the Second Reform Bill. Both represented anarchy, and the remedy for them was culture, a myth of concern which held the essence of everything good in conservative, liberal and radical values. It was conservative because it was aware of and accepted its tradition, and because it was a source of social authority. It was liberal because it was held, not through faith or dogma, but through reason and imagination, incorporating a sense of beauty and the virtues of the liberal attitude, including tolerance and suspended judgement. Consequently the real source of its tradition was Hellenic rather than Hebraic. It was radical because its authority was ultimately a spiritual authority, and so its long-run influence was an equalizing one, dissolving the hierarchy of classes by subordinating class conflict to a wider conception of social concern. Arnold also appeared to be saying, here and elsewhere, that literature would eventually assume the social function that religion then had.

Whatever one thinks of this last proposition, Arnold's doctrine in general was, for most humanists of my generation, the shadow of a rock in a weary land. Arnold gave a genuine social dimension to the study and teaching of the humanities, and did not, like Newman, insist that we sell out to some other interest, such as the anxieties of the Christian Church. But we notice that for Arnold literature, like Cressida, appears to have deserted the defending camp for the besieging one. The primitive social function of poetry was to teach the myth of concern; in Arnold's conception of culture, it seems to be associated with the values connected with individual freedom and the truth of correspondence.

Here Arnold was faithfully reflecting the cultural conditions of his time. One of the things that happens to literature, as it becomes assimilated to the mental habits of a writing culture, is that it

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comes to be thought of as an ornament of leisure, a secondary product of an advanced civilization. In the tenth book of Plato's *Republic,* Socrates asserts that the poet's version of reality is inferior, not merely to the philosopher's, but to the artisan's or craftsman's as well. The artisan makes what is, within the limits of his reality, a real bed; the painter has only the shadow of a bed. Most devaluations of poetry ever since, whether Platonic, Puritan, Marxist or Philistine, have been attached to some version of a work ethic which makes it a secondary or leisure-time activity; and when poetry has been socially accepted, it is normally accepted on the same assumptions, more positively regarded. This seems a curious conception of poetry in view of its original social role. In a technologically simple society preoccupied with the means of survival, like that of the Eskimos, poetry appears to be a primary need rather than a superfluous refinement. But increasingly, as Western culture became more complex, works of art came to be thought of as a series of objects to be enjoyed and appreciated by a liberalized leisure class.

A necessary part of this view of art is a decline of the sense of convention and, in poetry, of a community of words. The poet no longer has a communal "word-hoard," and only in the most subtle and indirect way is he thought of as possessing and retelling the essential myths of the society he lives in. The individual poem or novel comes rather to represent a unique or sealed-in experience, and a law of copyright assimilates literature to private property. Literature could not go as far in this direction as painting, where a picture acquires a purchaser or sole owner, but it went as far as it could. Kierkegaard, in contrasting Christian concern to the liberal and speculative attitude of his day, was so impressed by the similarity of the latter to the place of the arts in society that he called it the "aesthetic" attitude, and symbolized it by Mozart's *Don Giovanni,* more particularly by the catalogue of mistresses, the picture of the universal lover surrounded by a mass of attractive objects.

It would of course be nonsense, in any age, to think of the poet simply as producing luxury goods for an ascendant class. But after Edmund Burke's time, concern takes on the sense of continuity, the sense that we belong to something before we are anything, and that the community we join at birth completes our social context by attaching us to our traditions. The Classical education that was so important as a status symbol at this time had much to do with the sense of continuity with the past as a basis of concern. In-

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creasingly, from the Romantic movement onward, the poet becomes a representative of cultural tradition, and his poem acquires the oracular, over-determined emotional resonance of something that speaks to the depths of the mind of an age that has most of its conscious attention directed outside itself. Romantic poetry, in Keats and Coleridge, preserves the sense of a charm or spell woven around some guarded place, and a corresponding sense of separation from its audience. The later movement associated with Eliot, Pound, Hulme and Wyndham Lewis thought of itself as revolting against this, yet Wyndham Lewis ridiculed what he called the "dithyrambic spectator," the member of the audience bumptious enough to imagine that his presence made any difference to the creative process. A similar attitude, in him and in many others, led to the exalting of primitive and archaic art, which the distance in time and culture had tended to make inscrutably authoritative. In Mallarmé, in Rilke, even in Flaubert, the artist becomes a secular and initiating priest. This last suggests a certain affinity between the arts and religion to the extent that both become a kind of palladium or cultural monument. The fact that in America today one is entirely free to be of what religion one pleases, or of no religion at all, means that religion is no longer a central area of social concern; and a similar tolerance, similarly based on indifference, appears to be enveloping the arts as well. The French Impressionists, excluded from the Academy, set up their own "*salon des refusés*," but it is difficult even to imagine what sort of works of art would go into a *salon des refusés* today.

And yet other movements were demonstrating a very different context for poetry, and for the arts generally. In English literature, the immense significance of William Morris, as a revolutionary artist trying to show how the arts could still recover something of their original social role, needs an essay to itself. Yet Morris never escaped from the paradox in his position. In theory, the "minor" or socially active arts could transform society by destroying mechanical and mass production and recreating a community of brains and hands; but in practice they merely diversified the middle-class scene with a new aesthetic perspective. The voice was that of a revolutionary Esau, but the hands were the smooth and accommodating hands of Jacob. Much earlier, William Blake, another revolutionary artist trying to get around the mercantile machinery of publishers by etching and designing his own books, also found that what he was actually producing were luxury goods for well-to-do connoisseurs.

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A different type of revolutionary movement was starting up in the nineteenth century, mainly in France, having little in common with other revolutionary movements except its opposition to the bourgeois ascendancy. This was what the nineteenth century called Bohemianism, the way of life pursued by many creative artists, both poets and painters, in opposition to the mores of their society. The *vie de Bohème* was more hedonistic and freer in its sexual standards than its more respectable rival, and it carried on a guerrilla campaign against the kind of middle-class anxieties that are usually expressed by the word "decency." The symbols of its social opposition included drugs, specifically hashish, which is prominent in the imagery of Baudelaire, and a not-so-sweet disorder in the dress (*"je m'encrapule les plus possible,"* said Rimbaud). When this movement revived in the twentieth century, it was less completely identified with artists and became rather the expression of a revolutionary life-style, for which the spokesman was Freud rather than Marx. This was hardly a role that Freud would have envisaged for himself, but in the beat movement of the fifties, even in their hippie successors, one sees a curious effort to define a social proletariat in Freudian rather than Marxist terms. From its point of view, bourgeois society is a repressive anxiety-structure which is particularly disturbed by the sexual instinct, hence the renewal of society is bound up with the emancipating of that instinct, though this also involves associating it with the creative process.

Meanwhile the language of concern preserved in Christianity had begun to be examined more objectively, and this precipitated a crisis which we should take a moment to examine, as it is a model for our present subject, the difference between mythical and logical languages. The crisis is often called a crisis of belief, but it is really a crisis in understanding the language of belief, the growing realization that religion speaks the mythical and concerned language of poetry, and not the factual and evidential language of history.

When I am asked if I "believe in" ghosts, I usually reply that ghosts, from all accounts, appear to be matters of experience rather than of belief, and that so far I have had no experience of them. But the mere fact that the question takes such a form indicates that belief is usually connected in the mind with a vision of possibilities, of what might or could be true. We often use the term "believe" to mean a suspended sense experience. "I believe you will find a telephone on the next floor" means that if I were on the

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next floor I should see a telephone. In reference to past time this suspended sense experience becomes the acceptance of a historical fact: "I believe Julius Caesar existed" means that I think that if I had lived when and where he is said to have lived I should have seen him. "I believe in God" can hardly refer to a belief of this kind, but under the influence of the mental habits of a writing culture, concerned belief also has come to be associated with historical fact. This leads to such curious aberrations as "believing the Bible," i.e., of ascribing special virtue to asserting that in another culture, a few years ago and a few miles away, Jonah was swallowed by a great fish and Elijah carried up to heaven in a fiery chariot, and that if we had been present at those events we should have seen precisely what is described in the sacred text. Such belief is really a voluntarily induced schizophrenia, and is probably a fruitful source of the infantilism and the hysterical anxieties about belief which are so frequently found in the neighborhood of religion, at least in its more uncritical areas. One thinks of Don Quixote's remark to Sancho Panza, that the Golden Age would soon return if people would only see things as they are, and not allow themselves to be deluded by enchanters who make hundred-armed giants look like windmills. In the seventeenth century Sir Thomas Browne, reflecting on such matters as the fact that conditions in Noah's ark, after thirty-eight days or so, might become a trifle slummy, remarked "methinks there be not enough impossibilities in religion for an active faith." But of course when a faith beyond reason is looked at in this sort of playful or ironic light, it tends to become unconcerned. The more genuinely concerned faith is, the more quickly a hierarchy is established in it, in which "essential" beliefs are retained and less essential ones regarded as more expendable. But this conception of "essential" belief is, in spite of the word, introducing an existential element into belief. What we really believe is not what we say or think we believe but what our actions show that we believe, and no belief which is not an axiom of behavior is a genuinely concerned belief. Marxism has a similar conception of unessential belief, the "ideology" which is to be talked about but not acted upon, and which has the function of decorating the facade of a conservative attitude. Many of my readers would call what I am calling a myth of concern an ideology, and though, as I have indicated, I have specific reasons for using the term myth, those who prefer ideology may substitute it in most contexts.

For Milton writing *Paradise Lost* Adam and Eve were historical

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characters, his own literal ancestors, whose skeletons might conceivably be uncovered by an archaeologist. Milton is fond of contrasting the plain and sober Scriptural accounts with the extravagances of the heathen. Plainness, however, may result from a primitive as well as a credible element in the style, and we today are struck rather by the similarity of the Biblical stories of the fall and the flood to other myths in other cultures. As the Old Testament narrative proceeds, myth gives place to legend and what German critics call *Sage*, legend to historical reminiscence, historical reminiscence to didactic and manipulated history, and so on. But there are no clear boundary lines: all that seems clear is that whatever in the Old Testament may be historically accurate is not there because it is historically accurate, but for quite different reasons. Further, historical accuracy has no relation to spiritual significance. The Book of Job, which is avowedly an imaginative drama, is clearly more significant in the development of religion than the begats in Chronicles, which may well contain authentic records.

With the Gospels, however, surely things must be different, for Christianity has always insisted on the historical nature of its central event. We soon begin to wonder, however, whether the verbal presentation of that event is as historical as the event itself. We notice that the life of Christ in the Gospels is not presented biographically, as a piece of continuous prose writing founded on historical evidence, but as a discontinuous sequence of appearances (pericopes), which have a strongly mythical quality about them. If the approach were biographical we should want only one definitive Gospel, and of course the historical belief in them has always rested on some "harmony" of their narratives rather than on the four as they stand. Naturally many efforts have been made to extract a credible continuous narrative from what seems a mass of mythical accretions. Thus a century ago Ernest Renan, in his *Vie de Jésus*, began confidently with the statement that Jesus was born in Nazareth, the story that he was born in Bethlehem being inserted later to harmonize with Micah's prophecy that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. But, arguing on those terms, if the only reason for associating Jesus with Bethlehem is the passage in Micah, the only reason for associating him with Galilee is a similar passage in Isaiah (ix), and the only reason for associating him with Nazareth is to enable Matthew to make a dubious pun on "Nazirite." Renan's historical and credible statement, on his own basis of argument, dissolves into two more myths.

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As we go through the Gospels, with their miracles of healing and miraculous feeding and raising the dead and the like, we begin to wonder how much there is that must be historical, that is unambiguous evidence for a historical Jesus. The authors of the Gospels seem to care nothing for the kind of evidence that would interest a biographer; the only evidence they concern themselves with is coincidence with Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah. The result is that our historical evidence for the life of Jesus, besides being hermetically sealed within the New Testament, seems to melt away, as we try to grasp it, into echoes from the Old Testament or from contemporary Jewish ritual. As some factual basis for Jesus' life was obviously available to the authors, why did they make so oblique and limited a use of it? In any case, for any uncommitted reader of the Gospels, the question "could it really have happened just like that?" is bound to occur with great frequency. But at a certain point the question begins to turn into the form: "if I had been there, is that what I should have seen and experienced?" At this point the doubts become overwhelming, because most of these doubts are of one's own capacity for spiritual experience. Sir Thomas Browne's "I thank God that I never saw Christ or his disciples" begins to sound like a very shrewd remark. If I had been out on the hills of Bethlehem on the night of the birth of Christ, with the angels singing to the shepherds, I think that I should not have heard any angels singing. The reason why I think so is that I do not hear them now, and there is no reason to suppose that they have stopped.

If, under the influence of the mental habits of a writing culture, we insist on regarding a myth as a disguised way of presenting a real situation, we should have to regard the accounts of Jesus in the Gospels as highly suspect, if not actually fraudulent. But the impression of authority they convey is so strong that nobody is likely to take this possibility very seriously. It is much more probable that it is our conception of myth that is wrong, and it seems better to think of the authors as too concerned about the importance of their message to entrust what they had to say to merely historical or biographical idioms of language. The historian tries to put his reader where the event is, in the past. If he is writing about the assassination of Julius Caesar, he tries to make us see what we should have seen if we had been there, while keeping the additional understanding afforded by the distance in time. The apostle feels that if we had been "there," we should have seen nothing, or seen

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something utterly commonplace, or missed the whole significance of what we did see. So he comes to us, with his ritual drama of a Messiah, presenting a speaking picture which has to be, as Paul says, spiritually discerned. Myth is the language of the present tense, even of what is expressed by that abominable word "confrontation." There is a moral aspect of literature, stressed by Sidney in particular, which literature possesses through its power of idealized example. When poetry is the "companion of camps," a heroic achievement in the past is linked to another in the future of which the reader is the potential hero. The best way to connect the two, for Sidney, is to present the former in its universal shape, combining the historical example with the abstract precept or model. If we wish to be inspired by Achilles we must read Homer, and may well thank God that we never saw Achilles or his myrmidons. What is true of literature is *a fortiori* true of religion, where "go thou and do likewise" is always a part of the presentation.

The Bible, it may be said, is not a story-book or an epic poem; but it is much closer to being a work of literature than it is to being a work of history or even doctrine, and the kind of mental response that we bring to poetry has to be in the forefront of our understanding of it. This is, I think, what Matthew Arnold meant when he suggested that poetry would increasingly take on a religious importance in modern culture. It is not that poetry will become a substitute or replacement for religion, a situation that could only produce phony literature as well as a phony religion. It is rather that religion will come to be understood increasingly as having a poetic rather than a rational language, and that it can be more effectively taught and learned through the imagination than through doctrine or history. Imagination is not in itself concern, but for a culture with a highly developed sense of fact and of the limits of experience, the road to concern runs through the language of imagination.

I remarked earlier that every myth of concern is religious, in the sense of establishing a *religio* or common body of ritual acts and beliefs for the community. Of course, such a religion may be theistic and deny the finality of death, like Christianity, or atheistic and assert it, like Marxism. Marxism, and Christianity as long as it had temporal power, have tended to assume that a definite position on such points was obligatory on society as a whole, and hence, even if they could tolerate a group with a different position, they could not recognize such a difference as inevitable, certainly not as desirable. Democracy, which was preoccupied a good deal

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with trying to pare the claws of Christian temporal power, envisaged, in the American Constitution and elsewhere, a social order which could contain within itself a plurality of myths of concern, and which would accept the responsibility for keeping the peace among them. This establishes the distinction that I have elsewhere made between "open" and "closed" mythologies, in which only the former are capable of a genuine and functional toleration. Jews, for instance, are a minority group with a myth of concern peculiar to themselves: consequently any society with a closed myth which contains Jews is bound sooner or later to turn anti-Semitic. Occasionally we find it suggested that breaking up closed myths of concern may be part of the historical function of Judaism: thus the King of Persia complains, in (the Greek additions to) The Book of Esther: "in all nations throughout the world there is scattered a certain malicious people, that have laws contrary to all nations . . . so as the uniting of our kingdoms, honourably intended by us, cannot go forward."

A society with an open mythology still has, of course, its own predominant myth of concern. Nobody would say that "the American way of life" was less concerned than any other community's way of life. The principle of openness, however, is, so far as I can see, the only possible basis for a world community. It is chimerical to expect any one myth of concern to establish itself all over the world: the more widely any such myth spreads, the deeper the rifts that develop within it. What is potentially world-wide is an assumption, too broad in itself to constitute a myth of concern, that life is better than death, freedom better than slavery, happiness better than misery, health better than sickness, for all men everywhere without exception. This forms a principle for a myth of concern analogous to what Milton called the "rule of charity" for reading the Bible. According to Milton, the Bible is the great manifesto of human freedom, hence any text in it which seems to support an authoritarian way of life is being read out of context. Similarly, the freedom and happiness of all mankind forms the context within which a contemporary myth of concern ought to operate. An open myth can accommodate itself to such a context; a closed one cannot. A closed myth can only pursue its own ends, deciding at each step how much misery and slavery may be necessary (of course only temporarily) to advance those ends.

There are two aspects of this distinction between a closed and an open mythology that are particularly relevant here. In the first

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place, an open mythology establishes the relativity of a myth of concern, and so emphasizes the element of construct or imaginative vision in it. The view advanced above, that the language of Christianity is in its Biblical origin a mythical language, is an "open" view of it. It does not affect the reality of the Christian vision for anyone who holds it, but it puts it on the kind of basis on which communication, or what is now often called "dialogue," becomes possible with Jews or Moslems or Marxists, or even other Christians. When a myth of concern claims truth of correspondence as well as truth of vision, and assumes that its postulates are established facts, it can hardly produce any argument except the single exasperated formula: "But can't you *see* how wrong you are?" When it renounces this claim, it acquires the kind of humility which makes it possible to see intellectual honesty on the other side too. As for one's own side, one is not renouncing its truth: what one renounces is the finality of one's own understanding of that truth.

In the second place, the principle of openness in mythology is founded on the myth of freedom. Man is civilized by his social institutions, and those institutions provide a continuum which gives his individual life another dimension of meaning. Before he is born, he is predestined to be born of a certain race and social class and nationality at a certain point in time: thus before he has any personality he has a social context. The institutions to which he is attached are mainly products of concern, and they form the complex of temporal authority. He may spend his whole life in this context, but an educated man in a complex society also becomes aware, through his education, of another kind of authority, which has only an internal or inherent compulsion: the authority of the rational argument, the accurate measurement, the repeatable experiment, the compelling imagination. In times of crisis, when loyalty to temporal institutions is weakened, it begins to be clear that this purely spiritual authority is the permanent centre of real authority in a civilized community, and that all temporal power is temporary as well. This does not mean that it can ever become expendable or replaced by spiritual authority. Temporal authority is the parental aspect of society: it is always there and always primary, every revolt against it being also an identification with it. But, as such historical titles as "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" remind us, there is a rhythm of death and rebirth in it. Spiritual authority, on the other hand, which is closely associated with science and the acquiring of knowledge, keeps expanding as long as an organized

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social group is paying sufficient attention to it. This process of steady expansion has much to do, in our day, with the mortality of temporal power. We now appear to be going through one of those crucial periods of the death and rebirth of concern, and this situation forms the next stage of our critical path.

V

If our argument is on the right track so far, we get two kinds of education in life. The primary kind is an education in concern, an understanding of the axioms and assumptions on which the people around us act, or say they act. It is an education in loyalties, attachments, beliefs, responses and ideals, along with a growing sense of dissonance between professed and genuine beliefs, between ideals and realities. We study relatively little of it, and get most of it out of the air from our parents, teachers, and contemporaries. But every society has ways of insuring that we learn it, and learn it thoroughly and early, even though some aspects of it, such as the teaching of religion in a democracy, may be left to private enterprise. This is followed by a secondary education, mainly in the truth of correspondence, which is education properly speaking, and is the chief business of schools and universities. From the universities in particular, the concern of the educated minority, which is centered on the myth of freedom, leaks out to society as a whole. But whenever the sense of concern receives a shock, whenever the sense of a solid social order that we accept and go along with is weakened, we realize how primary social concern is. If concern is damaged, that damage must be patched up first, no matter what happens to the virtues fostered by reason and evidence.

This seems to be the kind of situation we are in now. In North America, at least, most of us take in, through the pores of our primary education, a concerned belief in democracy, as an inclusive social ideal that works toward giving equal rights to all its citizens. This ideal, many now feel, was kidnapped at the beginning by a social movement which was really oligarchical in tendency, based on various forms of exploitation, including slavery and later racism, and hence exclusive, which built up a hysterically competitive economy on a thunderous cannonade of advertising and other forms of systematic lying, and finally began to spill over into imperialistic crusades like the Vietnam war. The result is that many people, especially in the under-thirty age group, feel alienated from their

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own society, to the point of what is sometimes called an identity crisis. The lunatic obsessiveness of a foreign policy that keeps on making aggressive gestures at a time when any serious war would wipe out the human race forms the nucleus of this crisis. These are rationalizations of contemporary unrest: they cannot be causes (for causes we should probably look rather at such factors as noise, pollution and overcrowding), but in the area of our argument rationalizations are extremely important.

As a result there has been a strongly revived sense of concern, which finds much of its focus in the universities. The universities are the social centres of the myth of freedom, and are, by necessity, devoted to the virtues of the truth of correspondence, including objectivity and detachment. These are felt to be insufficient virtues in the face of a direct threat to human survival, and hence there is a strong desire to transform the university into a society of concern, like a church or political party. The reason for this curious and confused situation is that education itself, during the last century, has taken on many of the features of a myth of concern: compulsory and universal schooling, combined with the attempt to instil concerned social attitudes as part of the educational process (saluting the flag and the like), have turned the schools into a kind of secular church. At the university level the distinction between the two types of education is more clearly understood; the attempts to make it a society of concern are resisted, and so a kind of "sartor resartus" situation develops. In the symbolism of Carlyle's book, clothes reveal the body, by enabling it to become publicly visible, and at the same time they conceal and disguise it. When society is properly functioning, according to Carlyle, its institutions are a clothing that fits it and reveals its form; when society has outgrown its institutions and is due for a radical change, those institutions have become merely a disguise. The present mood of concern regards the university as part of the facade or outworn clothing of an "establishment" whose naked reality is a death-wish.

The impetus toward revealing nakedness, which often takes very literal forms, goes in both directions. In one direction is the attempt to tear off the disguises of tolerance and good will, of rationalization and liberal rhetoric, from the "establishment," and in the other there is the popularity of encounter groups and similar devices for uncovering one's "real" emotions. The ultimate result is assumed to be a confrontation of innocent with guilty nakedness. Prudery, it is felt, is an important element in ruling-class mythology

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for many reasons, one of which is a feeling that sex should be concealed and subordinated because it is something equally accessible to the working classes. Hence the shock tactics of "bad" words and an explicit emphasis on sexuality among contemporary radicals. These shock tactics have already largely accomplished, I should think, their original aim of changing the focus of the obscene expression. The celebrated four-letter words raise few eyebrows today, because the taboo on them never was based on much more than reflex. The real obscenities of our time, the words that no self-respecting person would seriously use, are the words that express hatred or contempt for people of different religion or nationality or skin color, and disapproval of such words is based on a more solid idea of what is socially dangerous.

The demand for "relevance" is another effort to develop a form of concerned thinking. This demand is of course most articulate in the departments of humanities and social sciences which are devoted to the study of social mythology. Here there is frequently a deadlock between students preoccupied with their own myths of concern and their teachers who are studying such matters in a more piecemeal way: the two groups do not always realize that they are talking about different things. The demand for relevance usually reflects something of the inner drive of all concerned thinking to become encyclopaedic, covering every aspect of human life and destiny. The natural tendency for scholarship to become specialized, even any reference to a discipline or a structure of thought, is apt to meet with the protest that this is a fragmented and compartmentalized approach to knowledge, now dangerously outmoded. There are of course some anti-intellectual trends latent here: concern may often come close to the "think with your blood" exhortations of the Nazis, for whom also relevance (*Zweckwissenschaft*) was a watchword. The issue is partly one of attaching greater approval to liquid than to solid metaphors: it is better to "keep things stirred up" than to be imprisoned in a "structure." Still it continues to make sense to say that all knowledge founded on the truth of correspondence is " tructured," and that whatever is "unstructured" is headed towards belief or concerned mythology, not knowledge. There is no contradiction between the fact that all knowledge is "structured," and the fact that there are no real boundaries or compartments in it, because of the total interconnection of knowledge, the fact that every field of knowledge is the centre of all knowledge. But such matters are unlikely to become

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clarified in collisions between claustrophobic students and agoraphobic scholars.

It seems obvious that, for people on this continent at least, the real cure for the identity crisis I mentioned above is the recovery of their own revolutionary and democratic myth of concern. Of course it is not only the "establishment" that has a facade, and some radicals also profess a democratic mythology who actually hold a very different one. Bourgeois democracy with its open myth is on the whole as mature and flexible a form of society as we have; consequently closed myths and authoritarian systems hold a strong attraction for immature and inflexible minds. But the great majority of those who are disaffected and restive are trying to articulate a democratic myth of concern, which is, after all, the only one they really know. Certainly there is a tremendous radical force in American culture, in Whitman's *Democratic Vistas*, in Thoreau's *Walden* and *Civil Disobedience*, in Jefferson's view of local self-determination, in Lincoln's conception of the Civil War as a revolution against the inner spirit of slavery, which could give a very different social slant to the American myth of concern. Ezra Pound, for all his crankiness, was trying to portray something of this innate radicalism in his John Adams Cantoes. And while some American radicals may look for the illustration of their social ideals in whatever Marxist leadership appears to be still in the age of innocence, like that of Che Guevara, this search for a heroic ideal just beyond the frontier is itself a central part of American mythology, and, as with the pool of Narcissus, the real source of its attractiveness is not difficult to find. There is of course a right wing that would like to make the American way of life a closed myth, but its prospects at the moment do not seem bright.

Thirty years ago, during the depression, the last thing that anyone would have predicted was the rise of anarchism as a revolutionary force. It seemed to have been destroyed by Stalinist Communism once and for all. But there are many reasons why the present radical mood is so strongly anarchist. In the first place, the radical American tradition just referred to, especially in Jefferson and Thoreau, shows many affinities with the decentralizing and separatist tendencies of anarchism, in striking contrast to orthodox Marxism, which had very little in the American tradition to attach itself to. There are some curious parallels between the present and the nineteenth-century American scene, between contemporary turn-on sessions and nineteenth-century ecstatic revivalism, be-

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tween beatnik and hippie communes and some of the nineteenth-century Utopian projects; and the populist movements at the turn of the century showed the same revolutionary ambivalence, tending equally to the left or to the right, that one sees today. Secondly, today's radical has inherited the heroic gloom of existentialism, with its doctrine that all genuine commitment begins in the revolt of the individual personality against an impersonal or otherwise absurd environment. The conception of the personal as inherently a revolutionary force began in a Christian context in Kierkegaard and was developed in a secular one by French writers associated with the resistance against the Nazis, the direct ancestor of the more localized revolutionary movements of our day.

The myths of concern and of freedom are ultimately inseparable, and the genuine individual can exist only where they join. When a myth of concern has everything its own way, it becomes the most squalid of tyrannies, with no moral principles except those of its own tactics, and a hatred of all human life that escapes from its particular obsessions. When a myth of freedom has everything its own way, it becomes a lazy and selfish parasite on a power-structure. Satire shows us in *1984* the society that has destroyed its myth of freedom, and in *Brave New World* the society that has forgotten its myth of concern. The emphasis on individuality makes it possible for the anarchism of our time to absorb more cultural elements than the Stalinism of the last generation seemed able to absorb. One of these is a middle-class disillusionment with the values of what is called an affluent society. This kind of disaffection is not, like orthodox Marxism, directed at the centres of economic power: it is rather a psychologically based revolution, a movement of protest directed at the anxieties of privilege. It does not fight for the workers against the exploiters: it attacks and ridicules the work ethic itself. It does not see Negro segregation or the Vietnam war merely as by-products of a class struggle: it sees the fears and prejudices involved in these issues as primary, and the insecurity that inspires them as the real enemy. Thus the revolutionary feeling of our time is, as previously indicated, at least as psychological as economic, as Freudian as it is Marxist, and many aspects of it carry on the "Bohemian" life-style revolution of the previous century already mentioned.

A revolutionary movement of this partly psychological kind is one in which the arts can play a central and functional role. A Marxist novelist or poet who finds his enemy in capitalism has to construct a literary analogue or illustration to a philosophy, like Sid-

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ney's poet. But in the situation around us the artist has an enemy that he can recognise and deal with in his own terms: the enemy of anti-art, the psychological defenses of advertising and propaganda which occupy the place of the arts if they are not dislodged. A militant art of this kind can hardly find itself in the position of the simple old-line Marxism, with its formula of protest before revolution, panegyric afterward. The revolution it fights for can never "take place": it is permanent revolution in the strictest sense, society engaged in a perpetual critique of itself, reforming and reclarifying its own mythology, its own troubled and inconsistent but still crusading vision of what it might be.

The growth of a new sense of concern brings with it the urgent necessity of understanding, not merely its psychology, but its mythical and poetic language. The greater relevance of the arts to social protest today is connected with another cultural fact of the greatest importance in our present argument: the quite sudden revival of oral culture, at least in the North American and European democracies. Oral culture had been fostered a good deal in Communist countries, where in any case the traditions of oral poetry had been much more active. But for us it is a new experience to think of contemporary poetry as consisting not so much of a small group of great poets as of a kind of diffused creative energy, much of which takes quite ephemeral forms. It used to be assumed that every creative effort worthy the name was aiming at permanence, and so was really addressed to posterity, but this notion does not have the prestige it once had. A fair amount of this creative energy takes the form of a poetry read or recited to listening groups which is close to improvisation, usually has some kind of musical accompaniment or background, and includes commentary on current social issues. Wyndham Lewis's contempt for the "dithyrambic spectator" seems very remote today: we are now in a culture of formulaic units and semi-improvised "happenings," where the role of the audience is of primary importance, and which demands a consolidation of social opinion. We shall not, I hope, go so far as to retribalize our culture completely around formulaic units, as China is now doing with the thoughts of Chairman Mao. But a similar oral context, and a similar appeal to immediate emotional response, is obviously reappearing in our literature.

When I began teaching, a generation ago, literature had become so assimilated to a writing culture that it was being looked at in reverse, and taught the wrong way round. Poetry is at the centre of

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literature; literary prose, in novels and plays and the like, forms the periphery; outside that again is utilitarian prose, the use of words for non-literary purposes. Educational theory assumed that literature was first of all an art of communication, interpreting the word communication in anti-imaginative terms. So its centre of gravity was utilitarian prose, which moved on to literary prose by way of relaxation, and finally, with the greatest reluctance, approached poetry, though as cautiously as if it were boiling oil. Students were told that the conventionalizing of speech known as prose, which is actually a very difficult and sophisticated convention, was in fact the natural way to talk and to think; hence they were compelled to compose sentences in what for them was a dead language, with nothing of the actual rhythms of speech in it. However, by the time they reached university they had become convinced that prose was the language of ordinary speech, though they often still could not write it and seldom or never spoke it, and that poetry was a perverse way of distorting ordinary prose statements. Educators today appear to be as ignorant and confused as ever, but their victims are less helpless. They have educated themselves, partly through movies and television, art-forms with an unparalleled power of presenting things in terms of symbol and archetype, and partly through the oral tradition, as it reaches them through folk singers and similar forms of poetic expression. As a result many students have come to think of poetry as a relatively normal form of thought and speech, and even such difficult poets as Wallace Stevens or the later Yeats are regarded with less panic than they were.

Along with this, and partly as a result of the influence of science fiction, there has grown up a new tolerance for schematic patterns in thinking, of a kind congenial to poetry, even for what a few years ago would have been considered superstitious nonsense and nothing more. Astrology, Tarot cards, the I Ching, maverick writers like Velikowski or Gurdjieff, all have their student following. It seems clear that the revival of oral culture and the growth of a revolutionary sense of concern are part of the same social process. This does not mean that a great age of poetry is about to dawn upon us: it means rather the opposite, an absorption of the poetic habit of mind into ordinary experience. We still read poetry by its symbolic "underthought," and have developed very subtle techniques of doing so. The general assumption is that, as Auden says of Yeats, if a poet seems to be "silly like us," time pardons all poets who can write well. But such poets as folk singers with a listening audience have

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to make a surface of explicit statement a part of their communication as well. Perhaps even silliness is not always a wholly unpoetic quality, nor is time always the most important critic.

This situation is so new that not all its social implications are clear yet. It is still not quite realized that the closer an art is to improvisation, the more it depends on a rigorous convention, as we see in the *commedia dell' arte*. The oral poet is concerned with the ritualized acts, or what Yeats called the ceremony of innocence, around which social activity revolves in an oral culture. Both oral poetry and the life it reflects rely on a spontaneity which has a thoroughly predictable general convention underlying it. It is consistent with this kind of culture that young people should be concerned, in McLuhan's formulaic phrase, more with roles than with goals, with a dramatic rather than a teleological conception of social function. One sees them throwing themselves into roles with great passion and conviction; but while the role solves the problem of sincerity, as the actor's sincerity consists in putting on his show and not in believing what he says, it does not solve the far greater problem of identity. The role is usually a part in someone else's play, and a great deal of youthful spontaneous idealism is obviously being exploited by leaders who do not share it, but who understand its predictable basis.

Then again, because the myths of concern and freedom stand and fall together, one's social function is inseparably a part of one's personality. Hence when the sense of concern is weakened, the sense of the continuity of the individual is weakened too. The individual life breaks down into a disconnected sequence of experiences, in which the sexual experiences bulk very prominently. One reason why they are so prominent is that one's sexual life, as such, is not so much individual as generic: people may love in individual ways, but copulation in itself, like birth and death, is of the species. I spoke of Kierkegaard's use of Leporello's catalogue of mistresses in *Don Giovanni* as a symbol of the "aesthetic," or falsely individualized, attitude to experience, and of course there is a sense in which all Don Giovanni's mistresses are the same woman, or more accurately the same female object. In the mechanical sexuality of so much contemporary drama and fiction there comes back into our culture something of the fetishism that we have in that quaint little paleolithic object called the Venus of Willendorf, all belly and teats and gaping vulva, but no face. The confusion between the physically intimate and the genuinely personal is parallel to, and doubtless related to,

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the confusion between the introverted and the creative experience in the drug cults.

I have spoken of the importance of the sententious utterance in literature, the existential commentary on life in general, which is so frequently embedded in a literary work. From medieval times until as late as the nineteenth century, such utterances were often regarded as the pearls of literature, worth opening the oyster to get. They descend historically from the oracles and proverbs which are typically the concerned prose of an oral culture. In both Greek and Hebrew literature the line of descent from actual oracles to the dark sayings of the wise is easy to see, though as usual the Hebrew development holds much more tenaciously to its origin. Proverbs, on the other hand, are popular rather than esoteric in reference, and collections of proverbs (there being something about the proverb, in all ages, that seems to stir the collector's instinct) appear in the "wisdom literature" of the Bible and elsewhere. In later literature we find oracular aphorisms more frequently in tragedies and proverbial ones in comedy and satire. The convention of beginning a story with a sententious comment, already well established in Boccaccio, is still going strong in the opening sentences of *Anna Karenina* and (in the key of delicate parody) *Pride and Prejudice*. The language of concern or belief is instinctively sententious and aphoristic, as anyone challenged to produce a statement of "What I Believe" would soon begin to demonstrate. Such aphorisms have a discontinuity about them that indicates a context other than that of logical or sequential connexion. So the question arises, to what context do such statements of concern belong?

Statements of belief or concern are existential, and therefore the most obvious context for them is the life of the person who makes or inspires them, and who is usually a leader or culture-hero of some kind. In religious leaders particularly we notice the link with the oral tradition: Jesus, Buddha, even Mohammed, do not write, but make their utterances usually in connexion with specific occasions, some of their disciples acting as secretaries, like the author of the collection of sayings of Jesus (Q) which is preserved in Matthew and Luke. In all theistic religions God speaks and man listens. Neither conception is simple, for all the efforts to make them so. God speaks, by hypothesis, in *accommodated* language, putting his thoughts and commandments into a humanly comprehensible form. And once the primary revelation is received, in prophecy or gospel or sura or oracle, man's listening takes the form of interpretation,

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which means critical reconstruction. There is no "literal" way of receiving a message from an infinite mind in finite language. Once a myth of concern is socially established, the personal focus falls on the leader or interpreter who is centrally responsible for sustaining the myth in history. This line of succession may derive from such a canonical organizer as Paul, whose letters, like the pamphlets of Lenin later, deal with specific tactical decisions in a way that leads to far-reaching theoretical principles. The succession of leaders may be regarded as definitive interpreters of the myth of concern, like the Pope with his *ex cathedra* infallibility in Catholic Christianity or the Marxist leaders. Such figures are really incarnations of a dialectic, like Plato's philosopher-king. In other contexts the incarnation may be a purely symbolic figure like Elizabeth II, in her role of "defender of the faith." The most primitive form of such a conception is the kind represented by the *Führerprinzip* of Nazism: a much more open and sophisticated one is that of the Constitution of the United States, which was theoretically dictated by an inspired people to a prophetic group of founding fathers. When two myths of concern collide, this personal focus is usually prominent in the collision. It was the repudiation of the largely symbolic cult of the deified Caesar that marked Christians and Jews off from the Roman world; and when Julian the Apostate tried to set up a more philosophical and "open" alternative to Christianity he could not avoid putting his own cult at the centre of it.

The earlier stages of a myth of concern usually include a development of a mainly oral oracular philosophy, associated with wise men, prophets or gurus whose sayings are also usually recorded, often very haphazardly, by disciples or scribes. A strong esoteric tendency to distinguish between an inner and an outer court of hearers, or between deep and shallow comprehension of the same doctrines, is notable here. The practice of reserving special teachings for a smaller group of initiates has run through philosophy from Pythagoras to Wittgenstein. Similar esoteric movements make their way, sometimes in the form of philosophical heresies, into the great religions, producing various Gnostic developments in Christianity, Sufism in Islam, and what eventually became the Mahayana vehicle in Buddhism. Any personality at the centre of a myth of concern whose life is the context of a body of teaching must be regarded as having reached a definitive level of truth. But as truth of concern is not truth of correspondence, and cannot strictly be verified and expanded like the established principles of a science, it follows that

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such a central personality is bound to create a hierarchy of response. This hierarchy of response may be represented, as above, by an inner group of specially enlightened followers, but in a socially ascendant myth it tends to become formalized in an institution, which becomes the acknowledged interpreter of the myth of concern, again on a hierarchical basis.

The more open the myth, the more the task of interpreting it begins to show analogies to literary criticism. The myth of concern usually exists as a body of words drawn up in the past, sometimes a remote past, and this body of words is, like the critic's text, unalterable. The variable factor is the new social situation provided by the interpreter's age; and as there is an indefinite series of such new situations, it follows that the original structure, again like the critic's text, is not only unalterable but inexhaustible in application. Thus the Supreme Court in America may not alter the Constitution, but must say what an eighteenth-century principle means in a twentieth-century world. The assumption is that the principles are comprehensive enough to be applicable to any current situation. At one extreme of this assumption would be the effort to keep twentieth-century America within an eighteenth or nineteenth-century framework, giving it the ossified stability of some primitive societies. No one advocates this, but conservative and nostalgic pastoral myths, idealizing "old-fashioned" morality or ways of life, cluster near this extreme. At the other extreme would be the assertion that the Constitution means nothing in the contemporary scene at all and must be scrapped for a new myth of concern. What such an interpretive activity does is to establish a pattern of continuity in time, linking the present both to the past and to the future so far as the future can be surmised.

The analogy with literary criticism is becoming clearer: the critic dealing with Shakespeare, let us say, has to try to grasp the implications of the fact that Shakespeare still holds the stage and still communicates with the present age, for reasons that would have been unintelligible to Shakespeare's contemporaries and probably to Shakespeare himself. At the same time Shakespeare lived in a specific age and addressed a specific audience which was remote from ours in cultural assumptions. The critic has, as one impossible extreme of his interpretation, the attempt to understand Shakespeare as Shakespeare's contemporaries may be supposed to have understood him. At the other extreme is the view that the historical Shakespeare does not really exist any longer, and that only the con-

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temporary critical revaluation of him exists. This view is sometimes advanced by critics as a paradox, but it is not very fruitful even as a paradox. Shakespeare's relation to his own time is the "liberal" or academic element in the study of Shakespeare; it brings us into contact with an alien culture, and expands our own notions of cultural possibilities. His relation to us is that of one more voice of concern, speaking with the authority of what Wallace Stevens calls the essential poem at the centre of things. It is not a contemporary voice, and it has the oracular quality of something definitively revealed in the past. The critic, like the Christian or Marxist theologian or atheologian, or like the legal interpreter of the Constitution, has to establish a pattern of continuity linking present culture with its heritage, and, to some degree, with its inheritors.

But the analogy of literary criticism to the interpreting of a myth of concern reminds us that statements of belief or concern can have another context than the existential one of a leader's life or body of thought and exhortation. In literature they have the context of a story, from which they emerge as comments or applications. From a literary point of view every statement of belief or concern can be seen as the moral of a fable. Thus statements of Christian belief are inseparable from the story of the Bible, which is, in its literary form, a comic romance. Similarly the Greek belief in fate, or whatever was meant by such words as *ananke*, *moira*, and *heimarmene*, is essentially chorus comment on the narrative form of tragedy which the Greeks invented. In our day we tend to go from the three R's in our education as directly as we can to a belief in, or at least an assent to, the three A's: anxiety, alienation, and absurdity. But these concepts again are noble sentiments derived from a prevailingly ironic age of fable.

When Raphael in Milton's *Paradise Lost* was sent down to talk to Adam, the reason for sending him was to impress Adam with the importance of not touching the forbidden tree. Raphael, however, refers only obliquely to the tree: what he mainly does is to tell Adam the story of the fall of Satan. The implication is that teaching through parable, the typical method of Jesus, is the appropriate way of educating a free man, which of course is what Adam is before his fall. After his fall, he gets from Michael a similar emblematic and illustrative instruction, though within his new and fallen category of time, where the events are prophecies of an inevitable future to him, records of an inescapable past to the reader. Yet education is still by story or "speaking picture," with morals attached, and the

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total containing structure of the teaching is the Christian romantic comedy of salvation. Angels, evidently, teach by fable; teaching by morals is merely human, and only the officially and institutionally human at that.

Every statement of belief or concern, then, has a context in a vision of society or of man's relation to his gods or his destiny, and such visions make up what is expressed imaginatively by the total body of literature. It then becomes clear that literature, conceived as a total structure, is not in itself a myth of concern: what it presents is the *language* of concern, the total range of its imaginative possibilities, the encyclopaedia of visions of human life and destiny which forms the context of all belief. "The Old and New Testaments are the Great Code of Art," said Blake, indicating the context of his own work, and similarly literature is the "great code" of concern. The Christian myth of concern derives ultimately from the Bible, and the Bible presents Christian beliefs in the context of visions or fables. Many of these, such as the stories of the fall or the flood, remain imaginatively sterile if one tries to rationalize or historicize them, but approached in the universalized terms of the imagination, they become conceivable as visionary sources of belief. Other myths of concern, democratic, Marxist, or whatnot, are also founded on visions of human life with a generic literary shape, usually comic. Literature as a whole also is to be related to a life, but it is the life of all humanity, the total verbal imagination of man.

Educating through the fable rather than through the moral involves all the responsibilities of a greater freedom, including the responsibility of rejecting censorship. Of all the things that Milton says about censorship in the *Areopagitica*, the most far-reaching in its implications seems to me to be his remark that a wise man will make a better use of an idle pamphlet than a fool would of Holy Scripture. That is, the reader is responsible for the moral quality of what he reads, and it is the desire to dodge this responsibility, either on one's own behalf or that of others, that produces censorship. Statements of concern are either right or wrong, which means, as the truth involved is not directly verifiable, that they are accepted as right or wrong. For the deeply concerned, all arguments are personal, in the bad sense, because all arguments are either for them or against them, and hence their proponent needs simply to be identified as one of us or one of the enemy. A censorship or *index expurgatorius* which separates all the works of the latter seems logical to certain types of concerned mentality. One sees the hierarchical in-

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stitution beginning to take shape here, with the censors forming an elite. The most unattractive quality of the censor is his contempt for other people. The censor says: "I want this play banned, because, while it can't possibly do me any harm, there are all those people over there who will be irreparably damaged in their morals if they see it." Similarly, the person who attaches a smear label to whatever he disagrees with is really saying: "It may be all very well to appeal to me with logical arguments, because I can see through them; but there are all those people over there who are not so astute, and who in any case will not act unless they are stampeded by slogans." The same habit of mind is common among all those whose main effort of thought is to save themselves trouble. I note in several Freudian books a tendency to dismiss Freudian revisionists or heretics like Jung or Adler as "reactionary." I mention Freud because he was in so many respects a conservative, pessimistic, even "reactionary" thinker who has been made into the founder of a myth of revolutionary optimism. In other words, no writer is inherently revolutionary or reactionary, whatever his views in his own lifetime may have been: it is the use made of him which ultimately determines what he is, and any writer may be potentially useful to anybody, in any way.

A more difficult assumption of responsibility relates to the poet's beliefs, and the particular concerns that he participates in. We have already met the principle that in reading poetry the "overthought," or explicit statement, is expendable to some degree, and that the "underthought" or progression of image and metaphor is the decisive meaning. When a myth of concern is derived from the teachings of a single man, or series of accredited teachers, those teachers must be regarded as in a very special sense wise or inspired men. No such respect need be accorded the poet so far as he represents a belief or attitude, however important and essential the belief may be to the poet himself. Hopkins and Claudel would probably never have bothered to keep on writing poetry without the drive of a powerful Catholic belief; but what makes them poets is their skill in using the language of concern, and hence they can be studied with the greatest devotion by readers who share none of their commitments. Still, most reasonable readers would respect a Catholic belief, whatever their own: a much more crucial example would be, say, Céline, who is a significant and important writer to many readers who could not possibly regard his views with anything but contempt.

The principles involved here which seem to me to be important

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to the present discussion are, first, that while the teacher of a myth of concern must be a wise or great or inspired man to his followers, the poet, or speaker of the language of concern, may be an important poet and yet, in certain crucial respects, almost any kind of a damned fool. Second, the subordination of reader to poet is tactical only: he studies his author with full attention, but the end at which he aims is a transfer of the poet's vision to himself. Poetry is not, then, to be merely enjoyed and appreciated, but to be possessed as well. Third, there are no negative visions: all poets are potentially positive contributors to man's body of vision, and no *index expurgatorius* or literary hell (to borrow a figure of Milton's) exists on any basis acceptable to a student of literature. Therefore, fourth, criticism does not aim at evaluation, which always means that the critic wants to get into the concern game himself, choosing a canon out of literature and so making it a single gigantic allegory of his own concern.

I have suggested that the restiveness we find all around us today, particularly in universities, derives from a weakening of the sense of concern, in a society where the need for social coherence is primary and the values of freedom and tolerance and rationality are derivative from it. In modern times the classical statement of this position is Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*, from which the existentialist traditions of our day mainly descend. For Kierkegaard the detached, liberal and impersonal attitude fostered by the study of an objective environment, and which flowers into comprehensive intellectual systems like that of Hegel, is an "aesthetic" attitude, and the crisis of life comes when we pass over into the commitment represented by "or," and enter the sphere of genuine personality and ethical freedom. Once one takes this step, one realizes that the "aesthetic" attitude was projected, because with this attitude man tries to fit himself into a larger container, the general outlines of which he can see with his reason, and forgetting that his reason built the container. The postulates of Kierkegaard's ethical freedom are Christian postulates, and his commitment is an acceptance of faith. The acceptance is essentially uncritical, because, so the argument runs, man is not a spectator of his own life. But, we have seen, the context of Christian faith in the Bible is a context of vision and fable and myth, and Kierkegaard does not really come to terms with the implications of this fact. Milton's portrayal of Adam looking at the sequence of Adamic life presented in the Bible, where the Christian faith becomes a total informing vision which Adam contemplates as a spec-

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tator, shows a far profounder grasp, not only of Christianity, but of the whole problem of concern. We cannot stop with the voluntary self-blinkering of commitment: on the other side of "or" is another step to be taken, a step from the committed to the creative, from primitive concern to a full awareness which derives from it and retains its values but carries them into a higher state. Man *is* a spectator of his own life, or at least of the larger vision in which his life is contained, but this vision is nothing external to himself and is not born out of nature or any objective environment. Yet it is not subjective either, because it is produced by the power of communication, the power that enables men, in Aristotle's phrase, not merely to come together to form a social life, but to remain together to form the good life.

VI

A certain critical element in one's education, which consists in becoming increasingly aware of one's own mythological conditioning, obviously has an important function in any open mythology. For example, a good many of the subjects studied in the university are the myths of concern themselves, in their various aspects: these constitute, as previously remarked, the mythological subjects: literature, religion, and large areas of other subjects in the humanities and social sciences. The mythological subjects are not identified as a group in any university curriculum, but the distinction between studying a myth of concern and promoting it is quite familiar in practice. In a democracy, a publicly supported university is supposed to teach a religion within the orbit of the truth of correspondence, presenting it as a faith that as a matter of historical fact has been or is held. Similarly, the university's role with other myths of concern is to study, for example, Marxism, but not to support the kind of seminar on Marxism which consists only of charging the batteries of the Marxist faithful. The same principle applies to the myth of democracy itself: it is not the function of a university to indoctrinate even that myth, because the public indoctrination of any myth tends to close it.

The principle of openness in a myth of concern does not, I said, prevent a society from having a myth of concern. What it does is to break up what is so often called its "monolithic" aspect. Expressions of faith in such a myth of concern as medieval Christianity may range from the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas to the crudest forms of relic fetishism. But all intense orthodoxy, however subtle or

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sophisticated, rests on a compromise with less enlightened versions of the same views. The latter can be deprecated, but not repudiated. Erasmus may ridicule or Luther denounce the popularity of indulgences and relics, but the Council of Trent must reaffirm the genuineness of these phenomena. Our own society is less orthodox in that sense. As in all societies, we are first introduced in childhood to popular social mythology, the steady rain of clichés and prejudices and assumptions that come to us from elementary schooling, from mass media, from entertainment, from conversation and gossip. In a society with an open mythology this process has little if any conscious aim, but unconsciously it aims, very precisely, at the same goal as that consciously sought in societies with closed myths, that is, the docile and obedient (or "adjusted") citizen. A few years ago (things have improved lately) the bulk of American education up to about grade eight was essentially an education in the clichés of American social mythology, the teaching of what purported to be literature being almost entirely so. But in an open mythology we encounter, as we go up the educational ladder, other forms of social mythology, some confirming the more elementary ones, others rejecting or repudiating them.

Although I remarked earlier that the collision between democratic faith and oligarchic fact in American society has produced an acute sense of social alienation, I have so far said nothing about "capitalism," which according to Communists is the central myth of concern in non-Communist countries. The belief in capitalism, so far as capitalism commands a belief, appears to rest mainly on an analogy between laissez-faire and liberalism, between the entrepreneur and the creative, adventurous or emancipated individual, of the kind that the phrase "free enterprise" suggests. This analogy is deeply embedded in the elementary social mythology I just referred to, and of course many Americans hold it for life. Others find it dishonest, or, at best, vague and unconvincing, and feel that social education involves outgrowing it. In general, it is perhaps true to say that in the countries technically called capitalist, capitalism is not a belief that is very seriously defended as a myth of concern. It rests for its dissemination on advertising, in the broadest sense; and advertising seems to be related to an open mythology much as propaganda is to a closed one. Advertising contains a residual irony: most of its statements are not expected to be literally believed by normal adults, and the gullible and impressionable audience it assumes is a largely fictitious one. In propaganda, of course, this re-

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sidual irony disappears, and with it most of the means for escaping from the pressure of what it says.

This situation has the great advantage, not merely of keeping American social mythology open, but of making a critical attitude toward that mythology, along with the education which fosters the attitude, functional in society. It has the disadvantage of making disillusionment so much a part of social education that it tends to leave one's permanent loyalties unformulated and undefined. There are those who accept the capitalist and oligarchical aspect of American society as a part of their loyalty; there are those who reject it in theory but come to terms with it in practice, and there are those who repudiate it in practice but are unable to say where their real loyalties belong. Much of the social energy that a myth of concern generates leaks away through the openings of critical and analytical attitudes. This is not a bad thing in itself, as a free society must have these attitudes, but it creates other problems.

Social mythology is polarized by two mythical conceptions, the conception of the social contract and the conception of the Utopia or ideal state. These two conceptions operate as informing principles in the mind: however much one may theoretically equate the Utopian with the illusory or the chimerical, it would be a very cynical person who could participate in society without some implied social ideal at some level of his consciousness. Similarly with the contract, which stresses the fact already mentioned, that our major social roles, along with our position in time and space, are prescribed for us before birth. These two principles of contract and Utopia descend historically, as myth, from their Christian predecessors, the alienation myth of the fall of man and the fulfilment myth of the City of God.

Of the new secular myths of concern that came into Western thought as the monopoly of Christianity declined, one, already referred to, was the conservatism expounded by Edmund Burke, which was based on the positive aspects of the social contract. For Burke, the development of the individual in society is largely a matter of growing organically out of the roots of one's social context. We are given our loyalties before we are capable of choosing them, and to try to reject what one is already committed to can only lead to chaos, both in one's life and in society. Further, it is the permanence and continuity of social institutions, including church and state, that not only civilizes man, but adds the real dimension of historical significance to his life.

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This conservative view was liberalized by a gradualist and sequential myth of progress, which after Darwin's time became a mythical analogy of evolution. I often turn to a favorite book of my childhood, H. G. Wells's *Outline of History,* which is a fascinating source book for progressive mythology. There, the "outline of history" is appended to a brief introductory account of the evolution of life, on the assumption that history follows the same direction of development that evolution does. We read near the beginning of a Neanderthal man who was "quite a passable human being," in spite of not being able to walk erect "as all living men do." I understand that the evidence for this statement depended on a single specimen who was later proved to have had arthritis. The important thing for the present context is not the adequacy of the evidence, but the symmetry of a gradualist myth, in which somebody had to shamble before homo sapiens could walk upright. A gradualist myth, in other words, needs inferior races, in order to lead up dramatically to the final epiphany of what Wells calls the "true men." Wells not being a fool, he does not identify these inferior races with Mongol hordes or the accursed progeny of Ham, so he puts them at the beginning of history, where they are both out of harm's way and are more convincingly related to their natural superiors, who have proved their superiority in two gradualist ways: by coming later and by still surviving.

The overtones of the social contract are ironic, even tragic; but nearly all popular historical myths are, like the myth of Christianity itself, derived from comic romance, the story of the successfully achieved quest. As G. K. Chesterton remarks, the Victorians assimilated history to a three-volume novel, with themselves as the happily-ending third volume; and a theory of gradual progress is the obvious way of providing a narrative shape for history without giving too much importance to revolution. Wells's post-Victorian version of this romance myth emphasizes the sequential structure inherent in all romance. The successful quest in romance is usually the third attempt, and in the passage referred to we have the evolution of man summarized in three stages: pithecanthropoid, Neanderthaler, and finally the true men.

The weak spot in the conservative emphasis on the contract, on playing the hand dealt to one at birth, so to speak, is the uncritical element in it. The primary justification for all social phenomena, in the conservative view, is simply the fact that they are there, and this makes it extremely difficult to distinguish reality from appear-

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ance in them, what they actually are from what they seem or pretend to be. Being involuntarily born into a certain nation seems hardly enough to compel one to adopt the maxim "my country right or wrong." The radical view of the social contract focuses on this uncritical element, and feels that maturity and development are a matter of becoming aware of our social conditioning, and so of making a choice between presented and discovered loyalties. The only real loyalty, from this point of view, is the voluntary or self-chosen loyalty, which is often loyalty to a social ideal not yet in existence. This transfer of loyalty from one's native society to another society still to be constructed creates an intensely Utopian state of mind.

The Marxist revolutionary movement is the Utopian counterpart to conservative gradualism in the modern world. When Engels contrasted Utopian and "scientific" socialism he was really completing the Utopian myth. In a world like ours a limited Utopia in a restricted or enclosed space is an empty fantasy: Utopia must be a world-wide transformation of the whole social order or it is nothing. But for it to be this it must be conceived, not as an *a priori* rational construct, as in most Utopian romances, but as the *telos* of history, the end to which history points. The "scientific" element in Engels's socialism, then, is a religious belief in the teleology of history. We see this particularly in the intensely teleological nature of Marxist revolutionary tactics, in which every strike or demonstration is one more step in the advance to the final takeover. Thus the Marxist myth of concern also has the shape of a comic romance, but one that puts its main attention on the final dragon-killing achievement and the separation of the hero's world from the threats and menaces surrounding him.

The belief in the continuity and in the manifesting of an inner purpose in history, and in the movement of time generally, had been built into Western religious and political thought from the earliest times. It was still there in the culture of the nineteenth century, not only in its thought but in the long novels that rolled through complication and crisis to an inevitable conclusion, in the symphonies that took off from and returned to the same tonality, in the pictures that were moments of arrested movement, like the self-portraits of Van Gogh or the dancers of Dégas. Nothing is more striking in our own day than the disappearance of this sense of continuity. The bourgeois progressive myth, which assumed a benevolent future on the whole, began to break down under the shocks

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of twentieth-century disasters, and the inherent paradox in the myth, that progress is a good thing and yet leads to increasing stability, became more obvious. Marxism could interpret the disasters more plausibly as the death-agonies of bourgeois culture, but the prevailing revolutionary mood of our time being anarchist, contemporary radicals have largely lost interest in the "historical process." The two teleological myths continue to dominate much of our thinking, but they do so increasingly out of habit rather than genuine conviction. The progress of science and technology produces an uneasy sense of a confused and rapid process of change that is just about to become clear: this sense has of course nothing to do with either science or technology, but is a social mirage, like flying saucers.

There is a very cruel donkey's carrot concealed in both progressive myths. Both project an ideal into the future; both can rationalize the most atrocious present acts as leading to a future good; both promise the gratitude of some hazy posterity for very real sacrifices of life and happiness to be made now; both present us with leaders who have the abstracted gaze of the car driver, looking forward to the imminent; both constantly tell us that we can really enjoy the blessings of our civilization only after some particular social hurdle is got over first. The appeal seems plausible until we start noticing that there is a series of hurdles, that the series never comes to an end, and that the earlier religious view was probably more realistic in assuming that the temporary hurdle could only be life itself, and could only be cleared by death. In the society of our day the unhappiest people are those who, in Sir Charles Snow's phrase, have the future in their bones: who convince themselves, every night, that Godot will infallibly come tomorrow.

The conservative acceptance of the social contract throws a strong emphasis on what is now called "commitment" or "engagement." These are not only largely uncritical attitudes, but also somewhat humorless: their instinct is to rationalize whatever they find existing in society, instead of recognizing injustices, anomalies or absurdities in it. Commitment and engagement are attitudes that imply the superiority of the continuum of society to the person who is involuntarily caught up by it. The authority of the social contract is a *de facto* authority: it lacks a genuinely ideal dimension, and thereby keeps social ideals in an empty world of wish or hope or promise. The radical Utopian attitude begins in detachment from

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conservative commitment and in moral judgement on what the conservative accepts. It transfers its loyalty to an ideal, and works toward gathering enough force around this ideal to smash the existing contract in its turn, thereby becoming a new *de facto* authority. But of course its potential society also demands commitment, of a much more intense kind. It recognizes anomalies and absurdities in existing society, but its own loyalty is still less critical, even more eager to rationalize, more impatient with dissent. In a time of a conflict of concerns, instead of getting more liberalism and tolerance we eventually get less, as each side tries to identify these qualities with the disguise of its enemy. The trouble is that myths of concern nearly always are in conflict, because concern, unless very open, must have an enemy. Marxist countries must have imperialistic aggressors; bourgeois societies must have Communist subversives, just as medieval Christendom had to have a pretext for starting the Crusades.

It has been fairly obvious all along that the myths of contract and of Utopia are interconnected. Every future ideal is the fruition of one supposed to have existed, actually or potentially, in the past. The heaven of the Christian myth, which we reach after death, returns us to a state of bliss set up before the beginning of history. The revolutionary future goal achieves the society of nature and reason that is the true social contract, buried under exploitation and tyranny. The conservative acceptance of the contract ensures a serene, or relatively serene, future by preserving the inner balance of society. All such mythologies connect the past and the future by building a bridge over the present. And yet this double dislocation of time seems to lead us into a curiously unreal world. We notice how frequently a myth of concern rests on a false version of history, or, at best, on a very strained interpretation of it. The future is similarly distorted, as ideals which are projected into the future get us involved in a pernicious means-to-an-end process which ignores the fact that means cannot lead to ends, because they condition and eventually replace those ends. One suspects that there must be some reality in the middle, and in the present moment, from which these past and future fictions have been projected.

If we look at the greatest writing about contracts and Utopias, the works of Plato, More, Locke or Rousseau, we notice, for example, that Socrates in the *Republic* is not concerned about setting up his ideal state anywhere: what he is concerned about is the analogy

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between his ideal state and the structure of the wise man's mind. The latter is an absolute dictatorship of reason controlling desire through the will, and these three elements correspond to the philosopher-king, soldiers and artisans of the political myth. The ideal state exists, so far as we know, only in such wise minds, who will obey its laws whatever society they are actually living in. In More's *Utopia,* the narrator Hythlodaye, who has been to Utopia, has returned a revolutionary communist, convinced that nothing can be done with Europe until its social system has been destroyed and a replica of the Utopia set up in its place. But More himself, to whom the story is being told, suggests using the knowledge of Utopia rather as a means of bringing about an improvement in European society from within. Thus the real Utopia becomes the social vision of the wise counsellor's mind. Plato and More realize that while the wise man's mind is rigidly disciplined, and while the mature state is ordered, we cannot take the analogy between the disciplined mind and the disciplined state too literally: if we did we should get the most frightful tyranny in the latter. The real Utopia is an individual goal, of which the disciplined society is an allegory. The end of commitment and engagement is the community: the logical end of detachment is the individual. But this is not an antithesis: the mature or fully rounded individual is so only after he has come to terms with his community. This is the reason why the individual goal is symbolized by a political analogy. The Utopian ideal points beyond the individual to a condition in which, as in Kant's kingdom of ends, society and individual are no longer in conflict, but have become different aspects of the same human body.

We do not now think of the wise man's mind as a dictatorship of reason, of which an authoritarian society could be an allegory: in fact we do not think about the wise man's mind at all. We think rather, in more Freudian terms, of a mind in which a principle of sanity is fighting for its life against a thundering herd of chaotic impulses, which cannot be simply suppressed but must be frequently indulged and humored, allowed to have their say even when it is silly or infantile. In short, we think of the mind as a participating democracy; and our social ideals become, as before, an idealized political allegory of such a mind. In this analogy there is no place for the inner-directed person who resists society, like Socrates, or More himself, and for that very reason the analogy seems more compelling. It is felt that because it is therapeutic

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for the individual to talk out his aggressions and get rid of his inhibitions and "hangups," a society in which everyone was doing this would be the ideal society of innocent nakedness referred to earlier. But here, as with earlier thinkers, the analogy is a tricky one. Several decades of sublimated violence have not made society any less violent, and the social response to sexual stimulation in entertainment is as itchy and prurient as it ever was. The moral I should draw from such facts is that the release of inhibitions is just as compulsive and hysterical an operation as the suppression of them could ever be.

When we take a second look at our great Utopian and contract writers, we begin to suspect that they are not really writing about contracts or Utopias at all, but about the theory of education. It is education that Plato and More and Locke and Rousseau really care about, and all their fictions about what happened in a remote past or might conceivably happen in a remote future are expendable. Wisdom, or whatever education is looking for, joins the individual to a community, but a different community from that of concern. It is the community of those who appeal to evidence, reason, experiment, and imagination, the largely non-mythical features of civilization which suggest an environment outside the immediate society and its enemies. This community constitutes the only genuine *de jure* or spiritual authority in society. The social contract and the ideal state, then, are projections, into the past and the future respectively, of a source of social authority that sits in the middle of our society, and which I shall call the educational contract. By the educational contract I mean the process by which the arts and sciences, with their methods of logic, experiment, amassing of evidence and imaginative presentation, actually operate as a source of authority in society. What they create is a free authority, something coherent enough to form a community, but not an authority in the sense of being able to apply external compulsion. The sense of the permanence and continuity of social institutions, so powerful in Burke's day, is now greatly weakened, along with the belief that they are any better for being permanent. There still remains the continuity of the arts and sciences. This is not a gradual continuity: every subject of knowledge has gone through a long series of revolutionary transformations. But the continuity is there, nevertheless, and is something that everyone experiences in his own education, as he recapitulates the earlier stages of the subjects he studies. From the point of view of educational experience, the

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continuity of knowledge is really the source of the continuity of social institutions, and the source to which we have to return in times of crisis.

This conception of an educational contract was the main contribution made by the development of educational theory in nineteenth-century England, usually regarded as one of the world's greatest eras of liberal thought. The educational contract is the area of free thought and discussion which is at the centre of John Stuart Mill's view of liberty, and which is thought of as a kind of intellectual counterpart of Parliament. It differs from Parliament, for Mill, in that the liberals can never have a majority, which is why democracy has to function as an illogical but deeply humane combination of majority rule and minority right. In Arnold the educational contract is called culture, and Arnold is explicit about culture's being the source of genuine authority in society and at the same time operating in a Utopian direction by breaking down the barriers of class conflict. Newman draws a distinction between liberal and useful knowledge, in which only the former belongs to the educational contract, but this is really a difference between two aspects of knowledge rather than two kinds of knowledge.

The educational contract is what the university in society primarily stands for. The conceptions of Mill, Arnold and Newman are wider than the university, but the university is their engine room, and their authority can last only so long as the university keeps operating. The university, then, is the source of free authority in society, not as an institution, but as the place where the appeal to reason, experiment, evidence and imagination is constantly going on. It is not and never can be a concerned organization, like a church or a political party, and the tactics of trying to revolutionize society by harassing and bedevilling the university are not serious tactics. The university is, of course, relatively easy to harass, and hence doing so may give a false sense of accomplishment.

In all societies the pressure in the direction of a closed myth is also the tendency within society to become a mob, that is, a social body without individuals or critical attitudes, united by slogans or clichés against some focus of hatred. A myth of concern, by itself, cannot prevent this kind of social degeneration. I have said that faith, or participation in a myth of concern, is not in itself verifiable. But to some extent it can be verified in experience. Some myths of concern obviously make a fuller life possible than others do. I spoke earlier of a "rule of charity" in a myth of concern which

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compares its activities to the total welfare of mankind. This is doubtless the primary criterion, but there is an important secondary one: the ability of a myth of concern to come to terms with the non-mythical criteria of truth and reality. Thus a religious faith which permits intellectual honesty is clearly better in practice than one which tries to deny elementary facts of history or science. I have tried to show that no myth of concern is really scientific, or is itself based on non-mythical criteria, but the necessity for a working arrangement between the two aspects of culture is clear enough. And perhaps the two standards, of charity and of intellectual honesty, are ultimately the same standard. Certainly such a myth of concern as Nazism, which ranks very low on the scale of charity because of its racism and exclusiveness, could not avoid the falsifying of history and science, and I suspect that the two vices always go together.

In its relation to literature the university is primarily a place of criticism. The university is a first-rate place for studying literature, but at best a second-rate place for producing it. And literary criticism in our day has to be aware of many things that many literary scholars do not yet see to be relevant to that subject. One is the fact that all myths of concern are founded on visions of society, and that all visions of society have literary shapes, generally romantic and comic shapes. Another is the result of the revival of oral culture, the decline of belief in the teleological myths, and the rise of a new anarchism for which "confrontation" is to some extent its own end. This result has been a concerted effort to break down the distinction between art and life, between stage and audience, drama and event or "happening," display and participation, social role and individual life-style. We thus have, among other things, new forms of social activity which are really improvised symbolic dramas. One example that I witnessed recently was the extraordinary sleepwalking ritual of the "people's park" crisis in Berkeley. Here a vacant lot with a fence around it became assimilated to the archetype of the expulsion from Eden, dramatizing the conflict of the democratic community and the oligarchical conspiracy in a pastoral mode related to some common conventions of the Western story. A student editorial informed us that the lot was "covered with blood" because, like all the rest of the land in North America, it had been stolen from the Indians (murder of Abel archetype). The expelling angels in this symbolism were (as in Blake's version of it) demonic, and the police, with their helmets and bayonets and gas

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masks, were endeavouring, with considerable success, to represent the demonic in its popular science fiction form, of robots or bug-eyed monsters from outer space.

It is not such casual recognitions of traditional symbolic patterns, however, that gives the critical study of literature so much importance for our time. Criticism is the attempt to attain knowledge of the language of concern and belief, and hence it has a central role in the study of human society. In developing this role it is bound to become more closely associated with neighboring disciplines, especially those in which the conceptions of myth, symbol and image are functional.

The distinction I have been drawing between the mythical and the logical, which is partly the ancient and traditional distinction between faith and knowledge, is, I think, valid for the kind of considerations that I have been dealing with here. There clearly is a difference in attitude, and in the direction that a given writer is facing. But theoretically the distinction is very vulnerable, as no doubt some of my readers are already impatient to tell me. Words are one of the languages, along with mathematics and the pictorial arts, for informing our knowledge of the world. But how far do words inform, as compared with equations or diagrams, and what are the distinctively verbal methods and characteristics of providing a form for knowledge? Then again, we cannot express any knowledge of the world in words without providing a verbal structure for it. How does this structure differ from a myth? A descriptive writer may produce an informing structure which "follows" the facts, or arranges them in the way that, as many such writers hopefully say, the facts themselves suggest. At what point do such arranging structures become wish-fulfilment or manipulating structures? Where does reason become rationalization? A closed myth of concern can readily answer these questions: for it, a writer is using reason when following that myth, and only rationalizing when he departs from it. More disinterested philosophers, however, find such questions very difficult, and I doubt if we can get much further with them without taking literary elements into account. Every arrangement of words is a narrative, and so has a narrative shape, and a study of narrative shapes involves the study of literature. Such are some of the "hermeneutic" problems awaiting the critics of the future. They indicate that the critical path, like all well-conducted paths, ends where it began, with the possibility of a new beginning.

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VII

The first principle of this discussion is that the social context of literature can only be understood after the conception of "literature" itself has been grasped. Literature has its own forms of statement, its own conventions, its own history. Society does not simply produce plays and poems and novels, but develops a literature, and writers draw their themes and genres and technical skills from that literature, not from their experience of life in general. Literature is therefore autonomous in the sense in which any coherent human activity is autonomous. It is literature and not life which "inspires" or gives form to a writer's output, just as it is science which inspires or gives form to a scientist's investigations. One runs into various simplistic antitheses at this point, many people telling us that a work of literature has to be directly resolved into its social and historical background, and that if we refuse to do this we are separating literature entirely from its social context. The assumption behind this view is that the literary form of a work of literature is a negligible and arbitrary feature, and that only the content of literature need be taken seriously. I tried to trace the origin of this attitude to the mental habits of a writing culture, for which "literal" or genuine meaning is established by non-literary forms. Such antitheses, however, are quite pointless obstacles to critical theory, as are the cliché-phrases they use, such as "art for art's sake." I can understand that a writer may often feel that what he has done is its own justification and its own end, and that his art is for the sake of art in that sense, but what the phrase could mean to a critic I do not know.

Literature begins, I have tried to suggest, in that undifferentiated period of society where culture is mainly oral, where history, philosophy, religion and politics are all united in a common mythical complex, which the poet is largely responsible for remembering, arranging, and transmitting. As writing develops, language becomes more conceptual and descriptive, and the sense of an objective order of nature begins to take shape. In this situation myths of concern attempt to preserve themselves by shifting their language to the rational and historical, but this in its turn creates a tension with non-mythical standards of judgement which bring in new criteria of truth and reality. In our society this tension has finally produced an "open" or pluralistic mythology with several myths of concern competing within it. Elsewhere in the world, notably in

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the two great Marxist empires, a closed myth of concern has taken over, and has harnessed literature to it, on the ground that literature must always be a means to a political end, and can only speak either for or against whatever myth of concern is in power. This attitude is based on the simplistic social/anti-social antitheses just mentioned. Those outside Marxist countries can see more clearly that such an attitude to literature is morally wrong and that the argument used to rationalize it is hysterical nonsense. The prescriptions of "social realism" have been notoriously incapable of coming to terms with anything in twentieth-century art which is genuinely revolutionary in form, and not merely in content.

It seems clear that a crucial test of a society's maturity is its ability, not merely to permit freedom of thought, but to release the language of concern itself, allowing the poets to follow whatever paths the conventions of literature in their time suggest. Left to itself, literature follows the encyclopaedic pattern of concern, and covers the entire imaginative range from romance to irony, although of course every age stresses certain conventions more than others. The critic's function is not to tell the poet what he should do, but to study what he does do: such a phrase as "of course I don't like this *kind* of poetry" can never be uttered by a serious critic. Hence the critic, like the poet, can function properly only in a society with an open mythology.

Poets are the children of concern: they show a liking for being converted to dogmatic creeds of all kinds, sometimes showing the greatest contempt for the toleration they receive; they are a competitive and traditionally an irritable group; their genius is one of intensity rather than wisdom or serenity. Nevertheless, as they lose their primitive social role and seem to become more and more isolated from the thought and material culture of their societies, another social function grows up in the original place. They give pleasure. And how on earth—an earth which after several civilized millennia seems to be as ferocious and psychotic an earth as ever—can pleasure grow out of concern? Concern is constantly on the borderline of anxiety, and anxiety is only a hairsbreadth away from bigotry and fanaticism, violence and terror. Yet the poet's role clearly has to do with providing pleasure, even though all the demons of obsession are inside his magic circle.

I touched on the pleasure of poetry earlier, in connexion with what Kierkegaard calls the aesthetic attitude to experience. What is insufficient about that conception of pleasure is its association

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with passivity, the vision behind it being one of a pleasantly stimulated subject contemplating an inscrutably beautiful object. This leads to an idolatry of art, a second-rate pseudo-concern in which art itself becomes an object of concern, something to be believed in. This attitude is out of fashion now, in theory, but some of its assumptions can still be found in the criticism, and still more the teaching, of literature. Even at its best it impoverishes the teaching process, because it ignores, or tries to get rid of, the vast pyramid of verbal experience which builds up to "worthwhile" literature. It commits itself to trying to impose a minority culture on the whole of society, an object which we must recognize as futile even if we sympathize with its aim. It seems better to realize that the highest forms of play are not spectator sports, and that the student is actively engaged with literature, not so far as he studies its classics, but so far as he uses words at all. The end of literary education, we said, is not a contemplative end, however much the admiration of masterpieces may form part of it. Its end is rather the expanding of the verbal creative power of the student, a power which does not necessarily operate in literature, though it cannot be expanded except through the study of literature.

Throughout this discussion of myth one mythical shape has constantly recurred: the theme of an original descent from a higher world, preserved in the Judaeo-Christian story of the fall from the garden of Eden into history, in the Classical legend of the decline from the Golden Age, in the Hindu and Buddhist conception of an unborn world beyond the wheel of life and death, in Rousseau's primitive society of nature and reason, in Heidegger's "being" as a state antecedent to the "thrownness" of "being there," and so on. There is no myth of concern that I know of which does not employ this framework of two levels of the world, the upper or ideal one associated either with the past or with the future, or, more commonly, with both. Yet as we looked at some of these myths, we began to suspect that all the social contracts established at the beginning of history and all the Utopias glittering at the end of it were really projected from something in the present, something connected with education and the good life.

For the critic, these worlds are the two verbal worlds, the upper world of imagination and the lower world of belief, concern, argument, and every form of verbal defence or aggression. The two worlds are, we saw, distinguished in Sidney as the golden world of poetry and the brazen world of nature, a distinction which

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aligns them with their Christian counterparts, and the same distinction forms the organizing structure of Shelley's treatise. In Shelley its counterpart is not the Christian fallen and unfallen worlds, but the Romantic distinction of *Verstand* and *Vernunft*, analytical and imaginative knowledge. The myths of belief enable members of a society to hold together, to accept authority, to be loyal to each other and courageous against attack. Such myths are verbal constructions designed for specific social purposes. In literature myths are disinterested: they are simply forms of human creativity, and as such they communicate the joy—a more concrete word than pleasure—that belongs to pure creation. They are formed out of every conceivable horror and iniquity of human life, and yet an inner exuberance lifts them clear of that life. Belief becomes imagination and concern pleasure, as the concerned myth, rooted in a specific culture and told for instruction, is emancipated into the nomadic folk tale, travelling freely around the world and told for fun. The function of criticism is to go on doing what literature itself does, by making its language intelligible to those remote from it in space or time or cultural attitude.

The world of imagination is the holiday or Sabbath world where we rest from belief. On earth and in history, Christianity destroyed the belief in the Classical gods, but the Classical gods promptly went to the imaginative heaven of poetry, and Venus was perhaps more genuinely revered in Renaissance Europe, as one of what Emily Dickinson calls "our confiscated gods," than she ever was in her temple at Cyprus. As a Sabbath world, literature is a temporary refuge from life, not because it is an unreal world of empty fantasies of escape or wish-fulfilment, but for the opposite reason. In life what we are united by must always include what we are united against: the enemy of concern is its inseparable shadow. It is difficult not to feel the force of the axiom, which comes down from Lucretius, that the social effects of religions, or structures of belief and concern generally, including the secular and atheistic ones, are evil, in direct proportion to their temporal power as closed myths. In the previous century Samuel Butler tried to show that it was a cultural disaster to exchange an old and sophisticated myth, which had been deprived of its inquisitorial powers and been forced to come to terms with tolerance and suspended judgement, for a young and naively dogmatic one, obsessed with the superiority of expediency to truth. It is better to know that one is lying than to feel that truth is expendable in a crisis, for there is

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always a crisis. But we have limited powers of choice in such matters, and whenever a new and powerful myth of concern develops we can see a dark age, or what Gibbon called the triumph of barbarism and religion, in its penumbra. An open myth of concern is infinitely better for human life than a closed one, yet an open mythology is by no means a panacea. Not only is there always a pressure within society to close its mythology, but the efforts to keep it open have to be strenuous, constant, delicate, unpopular, and above all largely negative.

One would arrive at a very pessimistic conclusion about the role of concern in society if it were not for the imagination, which, positively in comedy and romance and negatively in tragedy and irony, takes us from the brazen world of conflict into the golden world of peace. The world it discloses is, as is often said for very different reasons of New York, a place to visit and not to live in. Bob Dylan rightly says that there are no truths outside the garden of Eden, but the innocence needed to live continuously in such a world would require a nakedness far beyond anything that removing one's clothes could reach. If we could live in it, if we could lift our entire verbal experience from belief and concern to imagination, criticism would cease and the distinction between literature and life would disappear, because life would then be the incarnation of the creative word.

References

1. This essay has absorbed an earlier paper of mine, "Mythos and Logos," which was published in a pamphlet by the School of Letters, Indiana University, as part of its commemoration of its twentieth anniversary. It is also, in a few passages, very close to a paper called "The University and Personal Life," delivered to an educational conference at Quail Roost, North Carolina, and published in *The Relevance of Higher Education*, ed. Roy Niblett. I am grateful to Indiana Press and Tavistock Publications for their courtesy in allowing me to use this material.

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E. D. HIRSCH, JR.

Value and Knowledge in the Humanities

I WAS ASKED to write about some of the theoretical problems surrounding the concept of value in humane studies, a technical and theoretical subject that I have wrestled with before in print. But the pressing questions about value in the humanities are not technical, theoretical questions. Values are what people value—individually and in groups; values belong to the history of opinion, to anthropology, psychology, and sociology. Of course, there is need for theoretical analysis, especially in sorting out some of the confusions that arise when values are understood as having autonomous existence, but I do not find such exercises very pertinent when the hidden questions are really: What *can* be the values of the humanities and what values *should* the humanities serve in the world? These, to my mind, are not abstract, theoretical questions. They are pleas for re-examination and self-justification at a time when humane studies are under attack for being "irrelevant," which is to say lacking in value.

I have observed three kinds of response to the basic question that our students are pressing us to ask. At one extreme, the question is repudiated as a self-defeating obstacle to freedom of inquiry—a philistinic incomprehension of the inherent value in study for its own sake—a "barbarism of virtue." At the other extreme, we find professors accepting the accusation of irrelevance and joining their students to demand . . . well, "relevance," which is to say real value. The most striking example of the latter was the palace revolution in the Modern Language Association last year, in which the dissidents demanded, and in some part gained, ideological and political commitments from that elephantine association of scholars. But the most representative response has been sympathy for student concern and puzzlement about the ways in

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which humane study can and should be valuable. This condition of puzzlement I find the most honorable response of all not only because the problem *is* puzzling, but also because perplexity is more conducive to thinking out the problem than complacency on the one side or mindless moralism on the other.

The straightforward defense of things-as-they-are, of academic freedom, and of "the value of knowledge for its own sake" is an unsatisfactory response not only because it fails, in fact, to satisfy us or our students, but also because it cannot withstand the detached analysis that it commends. First of all, "knowledge for its own sake" is not and cannot be a value. Knowledge of any sort becomes a value when it is valuable to people. And if the knowledge pursued by professors in the humanities is not something they can persuade their students to value, then a problem exists—whether or not we think it ought to exist. If we cannot persuade either our students or ourselves, then certainly the problem is acute. "Knowledge for its own sake" is a pathetic fallacy. Who is knowledge?

The second line of defense in the conservative argument is "academic freedom." Freedom of inquiry is not by itself a value that sufficiently justifies humane studies. Precisely because humanistic inquiry is free, it requires justification. For freedom of inquiry implies choice: choice of subject-matter, of questions to be asked, of emphasis. But choice cannot be ethically neutral. While I am pursuing one sort of inquiry, I am excluding, for the moment, other sorts, and my freedom to practice this selectivity is consequently not all that I care about: I care about one sort of pursuit in preference to others. So, willy-nilly, value decisions come into play that go beyond the value decision in favor of freedom. On what bases do I make these further choices? No doubt I would need a depth psychologist to help me answer that, and I would also need a sage because I want to make a choice that is good, that is valuable. The implicit idea that an invisible hand assures the beneficial results of free inquiry is an evasion of responsibility.

The radical answer as expressed, for example, by the dissidents of the Modern Language Association is irresponsible in a different way. Where the conservative defender of academic freedom is naive to think that inquiry based upon choices can be ethically neutral, the radical activist is naive to suppose that inquiry as such can be bound to an ideology. Only the *choice* of a question

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is in the province of moral or ideological commitment. Once the choice is made, the results of inquiry are determined by evidence and by logic. It is an intellectual scandal to confuse relevance with inquiry by assuming that a particular social, moral, or political commitment must predetermine the results of an inquiry.

The fusion of ideology and inquiry is a sickness to which humane studies are peculiarly vulnerable. Historians had been composing Whig views of history long before Mannheim made his troublesome generalizations about the sociology of knowledge. But this fusion of ideology and inquiry most scientists would, on good evidence, vigorously resist. There is no doubt that ideology *can* predetermine the results of inquiry and is more likely to do so if the inquirer assumes that the fusion is inevitable. But this assumption boils down to pure skepticism with regard to inquiry itself. If ideology predetermines the results of inquiry, then inquiry itself is a charade in the service of ideology. We are then left with nothing but ideology.

This is the kind of skepticism that I detect behind the vigorous political activism within the Modern Language Association. Many humanists (and this is emphatically true of many MLA members) have lost faith in the scientific side of their enterprise. While they rightly conceive the centrality of relevance and value, they have overreacted in a way that betrays an underlying skepticism with regard to inquiry itself. This overreaction also betrays something more laudable. It implies a recognition that our professional activity has become more and more self-absorbed, abstract, esoteric, and trivialized. Skepticism and decadence! If the professors sense it, the students sense it more acutely. But we can overcome decadence without giving way to skepticism, for decadence in the humanities is the foster-child of skepticism.

This filial and incestuous relationship (like Milton's Sin and Death) is exemplified in the recent history of literary studies. Literary skepticism owes something, of course, to notions like Mannheim's that have pervaded the intellectual atmosphere, but the direct historical lineage can be traced to the victory about thirty years ago of interpretive (so-called "critical") study over external historical study. Now this victory meant a genuine renovation and invigoration of literary study. The new "relevance" then defeated the old, decadent, trivial, external study which searched out facts about Shakespeare in the Public Records Office instead of pondering the meaning of his plays. But this new revolution was also

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betrayed. When everyone began to ponder "the works themselves," a premium began to be placed on new "readings" instead of new facts, and the "readings" as they multiplied became more and more diversified, more and more remote, ingenious, abstract, and decadent. The fashion of close reading has now run its course. The excitement and relevance it carried at first has declined into mechanical exercises which engage students only a little less than their teachers. For naturally, if every reading of a standard text merely becomes a new addition to the growing list, one very probable consequence will be a sense of futility, relativism, and skepticism. The only thing to be looked for is a new "approach" or a "novel and interesting perspective." Why not turn to politics and social action?

That is the negative side of the renewed soul-searching in the humanities. But emphasis on renewal, on touching earth again, on forging a connection between our teaching, our writing, and the concerns of our students—these are also impulses towards health and recovery. One sees signs of recovery in the repudiation of esotericism and faddism even while one observes the continued dominance of these symptoms. The therapeutic virtue of dissent will be dissipated, however, unless the underlying skepticism about humanistic inquiry itself is also combatted and unless there is also a renewal of confidence in the scientific side of our enterprise.

I use the word "scientific." In the humanities it has been a red flag since the nineteenth century. In the earlier conflict between science and humanistic culture, "science" signified a dehumanizing positivism, and now it has become an even more disturbing term, signifying also the dehumanization of life by technology. My original title for this paper was "Value and *Science* in the Humanities," but since stock responses are not to be discounted, I have substituted the word "knowledge." It is time, however, to show my hand: "Science" *is* "knowledge," both in etymology and in fact. All serious inquiry, including humanistic inquiry, aims at knowledge and is consequently scientific. It is scientific in precisely the same sense that geology or physics is scientific. Nor is the proposition blunted or qualified by saying, "Yes, well then, call the humanities 'sciences,' but distinguish them from the 'exact' sciences." That merely avoids the issue since exactitude is a variable in all fields of inquiry. In fact, to concede that a result of inquiry may be only an uncertain approximation is, in itself, a way of achieving exactitude in results, a way of making knowledge exact.

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The attempt to formulate a satisfactory theoretical distinction between the cognitive element in the humanities and in the natural sciences has an interesting and predominantly German history. Whether or not the debate (conducted mainly by neo-Kantians towards the end of the nineteenth century) was influenced by the appropriate neutrality of the word *Wissenschaft* remains an unanswered question. (The closest English equivalent to *Wissenschaft* is the word "discipline," which is not close enough.) In any case, it became convenient to conduct the debate by distinguishing the *Geisteswissenschaften* or *Kulturwissenschaften* on the one side from the *Naturwissenschaften* on the other. And the purpose of the distinction was to defend the autonomous character of knowledge in the humanities against the intellectual imperialism of natural science. For if humane knowledge tried to compete with science on its own, positivistic grounds, then the humanities would belie their native character and turn into mere pseudoscience.

In the first volume of his *Introduction to the Humane Sciences* (1883), Dilthey attempted to set forth coherent theoretical foundations for the *Geisteswissenschaften*, just as Whewell had done for the natural sciences in his *History of the Inductive Sciences* (1847) and Mill had done in his System of [*Inductive*] *Logic* (1843). Dilthey's attempt, however, was strikingly influenced by these two books, and his epistemological models were dependent upon those of natural science. The main distinctions he drew between the two great domains pertained to their subject-matter rather than their methodology.

This view was sharply challenged by Windelband eleven years later in his famous lecture on "History and Natural Science." He proposed that the division of knowledge into natural and humane sciences was justified not merely by their different subject-matters, but also and more fundamentally "by the formal character of their different epistemological goals," for "the one seeks *general* laws, while the other seeks *particular* historical facts." Natural science, therefore, is "nomothetic" or legislative, while humane knowledge is "idiographic," or unique and individual. Subsumption under general laws in the natural sciences is *Erklären*, but the aim of humane studies is *Verstehen*, understanding the particular in its uniqueness.

The ensuing discussion comprised Dilthey's answer, *Naturwissenschaften und Geisteswissenschaften* (1895), and a book by Rick-

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ert, *Kulturwissenschaften und Naturwissenschaften* (1899). The debate is still instructive, not for what it resolved, but for what it failed to resolve. In replying to Windelband, Dilthey was surely right to insist that generalizing and particularizing aims are common to both domains. But was Dilthey's distinction any more adequate or definitive—namely, the distinction between the internal and the external sciences? All the distinctions brought forward in the debate are useful as indications of preponderant tendencies; as adequate, subsumptive generalizations, they are total failures.

The debate about the nature of the humanities did not stop with Dilthey and Windelband nor did the theory of science stop with Whewell and Mill, but I shall venture to suggest that at least one element of scientific theory is by now well-established and is identical with the theory of cognitive inquiry in the humanities. The progress and consolidation of knowledge in both domains are governed by the critical testing of hypotheses with reference to evidence and logic. If we look at any field of inquiry, we discover that it can be described as a congeries of hypotheses, some of them well-accepted and others in rivalry with alternative hypotheses. We also discover a large body of evidence relevant to those hypotheses and potentially relevant to others not yet conceived. Under this conception, all empirical inquiry is a process directed towards increasing the probability of learning the truth. This probability is, of course, increased whenever supportive evidence is increased. On the other hand, when hypotheses are called into doubt by the discovery of unfavorable evidence, then some adjustment is made, or some rival hypothesis accepted, or the whole issue is thrown into doubt. But in all these latter cases, the direction is still towards increased probability of truth, since the very instability imposed by unfavorable evidence reduces confidence in previously accepted hypotheses and to that extent reduces the probability of error. Knowledge in all empirical domains thus turns out to be a process rather than a static system, and the direction of the process is towards increased probability of learning the truth.

Now this is a very abstract and simplified model for inquiry, but it is the kind of model that every serious inquirer assumes. Furthermore, it is an accurate model to the extent that it *is* widely assumed. For I have referred not only to the logical relationship between evidence, hypothesis, and probability, but also to a communal enterprise that exists only to the extent that this logical

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relationship remains the thought-model (or ideology!) for the members of a community of inquirers. On the simplest level, the members of the community cannot even maintain an increasing body of evidence unless past evidence is stored and is brought to bear, when relevant, on hypotheses presently entertained. Nor can the model be accurate if unfavorable evidence is suppressed by a conspiracy of the inquiring community. Nor is the model descriptive if no one bothers to bring unfavorable evidence to bear upon an hypothesis to which it is relevant. Thus in a special sense, there is a sociology of knowledge on which inquiry depends, on which all science depends. And to the extent that this sense of the communal enterprise collapses, so does the discipline itself collapse as a discipline.

Now it is perfectly true that all the individual members in a discipline do not preserve a selfless devotion to the communal enterprise. The inspiriting description of such devotion in Max Weber's *Wissenschaft als Beruf* remains one of Weber's ideal types. The spirit of advocacy and the spirit of vanity are almost never completely absent in any individual endeavor. And this, no doubt, will complicate any accurate description of a discipline. But healthy and progressive disciplines do exist. Somehow, even if partly through counter-advocacy and counter-vanity, past evidence is borne upon present hypotheses, and unfavorable evidence is sought in order to test hypotheses. A sense of the community exists precisely because a sense of the discipline exists. The key factor is that the process of knowledge occurs *on the level of the discipline*. Despite individual eccentricities, brilliant guesses accompanied by brilliant perversities, the direction of knowledge goes forward at the level of the discipline. The probability of truth does in fact increase, so long as the sense of the inquiring community persists and inferences are drawn at the level of the discipline.

The communal aspect of knowledge insures that widespread skepticism will bring into existence the historical grounds for skepticism in a discipline. If there is a decline in commitment to the critical testing of hypotheses against all the known relevant evidence, and if the consolidation and discovery of evidence are neglected, then the process of knowledge ceases, and skepticism regarding the actuality of that process is entirely warranted. But the converse is also true: Commitment to the logic of inquiry and to the communal nature of a discipline guarantees an actual pro-

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cess of knowledge, and this holds for every subject of empirical inquiry, including every subject in the humanities.

The communal conception of a discipline is widely assumed in the humanities, but also widely undercut by the humanists' emphasis on rhetoric. Now obviously the consolidated knowledge within a discipline has nothing directly to do with rhetoric. On the other hand, the communal acceptance of hypotheses has much to do with persuasion, and persuasion in doubtful matters requires attention to rhetoric. Furthermore, the goals of humanists often comprise aims that go beyond the aim of knowledge, such as taking aesthetic pleasure in discourse or persuading readers to adopt value preferences that can be related to the cognition of a subject-matter. Thus the perennial questions arise: Is Clio science or muse? Is literary criticism an art or a science? The importance of rhetoric makes these appear to be difficult questions in the humanities, but in fact they are not. Obviously, rhetoric can subserve knowledge as well as intellectual chicanery; rhetoric can make the worse reason appear the better. But when a discipline is viewed as a communal enterprise, the hypotheses it tests are not bound to any single expression of them. Hypotheses have to be communicated as well as tested, but *what* is communicated must be used, tested, and expressed by others in a different form. If this condition is not met, the hypothesis is not really subject to criticism at the level of the discipline and has nothing to do with knowledge. It is therefore essential to distinguish hypotheses and evidence from the rhetoric used to convey them. The *writing* of history is an art, or can be, but history is not an art; it is a discipline, which is to say a science. The same is true implicitly of literary studies, though one sometimes despairs that this concept can be widely accepted nowadays. When it is accepted, the discipline will regain its health.

What I have just said implies that I identify the health of the humanities with their scientific self-confidence. That is true, but it is only half the story. The health of a discipline as a discipline is entirely dependent upon the devoted allegiance of its members to the logic of inquiry. But the health of the humanities is also dependent upon their axiological self-confidence, their sense that they are pursuing *valuable* inquiry. It is just as important to distinguish these two kinds of health as it is to promote both. Indeed, I think we can have both only if we are capable of making this distinction. We humanists sometimes blur the distinction be-

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tween value and knowledge just as we sometimes blur the one between rhetoric and knowledge. It is just as easy to know rigorously what is not worth knowing as it is to express with eloquent persuasiveness what is in fact nonsense. Some recent debates in literary theory have centered on whether the knowledge of a literary work can be separated from a judgment of its value, as though it were somehow not possible for two critics to understand a work with equal accuracy and yet esteem it quite differently. But, of course, they can do this. The humanist's urge to conflate valuation and knowledge can be explained, but the explanation would be a digression from the issue at hand—which is the central importance of avoiding this confusion.

Why is it important? Without this confusion, we can redirect attention to the fact that a scientific or cognitive element inheres in every field of the humanities, that the logic of this scientific process is the same for all subject-matters, and that this process of knowledge can be followed out on subjects of intense value or on subjects whose value will probably be very low, both now and in the future. The distinction is important, therefore, to protect the integrity of inquiry in the humanities so that inquiry itself is not repudiated simply because some of its subject-matters may have become trivial. The distinction is important, too, because it encourages a choice of those subject-matters that are not trivial and whose potential or actual value is high.

This has come to be well understood in the natural sciences, where decisions about the probable value of inquiry involve immense allocations of money and human talent, both of which are limited. Now it is perfectly true that the future value of any inquiry is an unknown, and this is the most powerful argument for total freedom of inquiry. On the other hand, if we were not able to make shrewd predictions about the future value of an inquiry, we could not award the few research grants available in the humanities. And surely, in a sense, each humanist awards himself his own research grant when he decides what professional projects he will pursue in the time available to him. The logical integrity of inquiry is a machine of fatalism, but the choice of inquiry is potentially free and should not be determined for us by a drift in the currents of intellectual fashion. This is why the present demand that humanists make an accounting is a potential source of axiological health for the humanities.

Of course, the demand could be barbaric—especially when

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made by barbarians. Clearly, many aspects, valuable aspects, of humanistic knowledge do not bear even indirectly on racism, social justice, or Vietnam. The demand for the *immediate* relevance of every aspect of humanistic inquiry is just as mindless and self-defeating as the demand for immediate applicability in the natural sciences. Yet surely the immediacy of problems does not disqualify them as subjects of inquiry; surely the concept of "pure" research is overrated if no one can predict how such research could possibly be valuable. If the prediction cannot be made, then the likelihood that the research will ever be valuable is clearly reduced, even though it may in fact turn out to be of great moment. No one will inhibit a humanist (since he does not need a big laboratory) from pursuing whatever happens to interest him. But if he cannot foresee potential value in his work, according to whatever value scheme he honors, then he should not be surprised if his work turns out to have small value.

Consequently, it is not really barbaric to question the ideal of purity in research by pointing to the ethical dimension—to the fact that choice of a subject for inquiry *is* a choice and therefore also an ethical problem. One way to resolve an ethical problem is to consider it consciously, to think out the probable consequences of the choice in comparison with the probable consequences of alternative choices. So many *ad hoc* factors will enter into such a consideration that it would be foolish to classify them abstractly. Nevertheless, one element in such a consideration by a humanist seems to me unavoidable. Humanistic inquiries are normally pursued in the universities, and humanists are normally university teachers. The question "What should I study?" is therefore normally asked by someone who must also ask himself "What shall I teach my students?" Certainly, the two questions are not the same. But since an individual's energy is limited, just as are communal resources, the two questions are not totally unrelated.

Almost every university is rethinking its curriculum, while university departments, especially in the humanities, are asking themselves "What shall we teach our students?" One reason this is happening is that the various humanistic disciplines have undergone the kind of development I described as having occurred in literary studies—the kind of development that occurs in almost every field of inquiry. An inspiriting revolution takes place, an invigorating change of emphasis; this direction is pursued with enthusiasm until similar projects begin to multiply and then crowd upon one

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another—like thronged colonies of lemmings who must drown themselves in the sea. The inquiries have replicated themselves, have become trivial, abstract, disoriented, and decadent. At the same time, these inquiries form the basis for our teaching, and our students readily perceive the disconnection between our present forms of inquiry and the earlier enthusiasm that sponsored them. I am not aware of any university course in which a teacher's conviction of vitality and value in a subject has not infected a large portion of his students, particularly if he is able to say why the subject is vital and important.

This observation has two divergent implications for humanistic pursuits. One of them is that some of us may have to separate very decisively the questions "What shall I study?" and "What shall I teach?" If my students are looking for life wisdom in Shakespeare when I have a special fondness for the problem of how forest scenes were staged in the Elizabethan theater, and if I am giving *the* undergraduate course in Shakespeare, I will have to separate my two lives to some extent. Humanists do have a vocational obligation in our secularized world; the hungry mouths need to be fed as honestly as possible. This does not mean that I should not even mention the fascinating problem of Elizabethan staging. My students will be fascinated too, particularly if I disclose my awareness that there are far more important questions to be asked about Shakespeare. Sometimes this kind of separation is inevitable. Speaking personally, I have a powerful conviction of the value and importance of pursuing certain theoretical and technical problems. Most of my students are only mildly interested in these, and I have had to learn how to direct my teaching, without entirely abandoning my special interests, to problems that are somewhat more pressing to them than to me.

On the other hand, this separation of roles is not always an inevitable condition of the inquirer-teacher in the humanities. After all, the humanist is also a teacher of new values and new needs, which can replace some of those his students bring with them. But I am firmly persuaded that humanistic inquiry must seem vital to the teacher before it can seem so to his students. An ideal condition of health in the humanities exists when inquiry and teaching are not widely separated, when inquiry appears vital to teacher and student alike. This condition is usually met when a field of inquiry is itself renewed, when it touches earth again and becomes convinced of its own worth and of the brave new worlds it has to

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conquer. That means revolution—intellectual revolution. Such revolutions have always occurred and always will, and the one that is now going on should be welcomed for the temporary rejuvenation it can bring.

The rejuvenation of humanistic inquiry is not likely to occur, however, if the revolution is implicitly directed against inquiry itself. In this heterogeneous culture, humanists no longer share a guild ethic. They may or may not agree that every historical inquiry is valuable because it "tells us something about man" or "broadens our horizons." And they will hardly agree about the relative importance of different inquiries or about which text belongs to "the best that is known and thought in the world." But the agreement of humanists with regard to inquiry itself is another matter. Humanists are such only because they belong to a community of inquirers. The humanities exist only because such a community exists, and that community cannot exist except by a shared allegiance to the universal logic of inquiry. Unexamined skepticism on this point is not a tough-minded virtue, but a vice that is fatal to any communal intellectual pursuit. There is a supra-individual and timeless contribution in the humanist's professional work that resides in its authentically scientific aspect. We humanists give up everything if we make this cognitive aspect a mere hostage to our ideological concern for relevance and value.

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GEOFFREY HARTMAN

Toward Literary History

"Go to Art, and tell him Pop sent you."
Chafed Elbows

I AM concerned with the idea of history by which men live, and especially with the idea of history by which poets have lived. No one has yet written a history from the point of view of the poets—from within their consciousness of the historical vocation of art. To write decent literary history is, of course, important in itself: We are all disenchanted with those picaresque adventures in pseudo-causality that go under the name of literary history, those handbooks with footnotes that claim to sing of the whole, but load every rift with glue. Twenty years ago Wellek and Warren were forced to ask, "Is it *possible* to write literary history, that is, to write that which will be both literary [in subject] and a history?" Most histories of literature, the authors continued, "are either social histories, or histories of thought as illustrated in literature, or impressions and judgments on specific works arranged in more or less chronological order."[1]

The dissatisfaction with literary history is not limited to this country. In 1950 Werner Krauss, the distinguished East German scholar, published an essay entitled "Literary History as a Historical Duty" (*Literaturgeschichte als geschichtlicher Auftrag*); and Hans Robert Jauss recently delivered an inaugural lecture at Konstanz on "Literary History as Provocation."[2] American scholars, in fact, have been slower than their European colleagues to shake off that distrust of speculative ideas that came in reaction to the giddy era of *Geistesgeschichte* and the equally dubious if more sober pomps of the History of Ideas. This cautiousness has long degenerated into the positivist's medley of fact and fashionable ideas or into a formalistic kind of literary criticism only vaguely in touch with history writing.[3] Yet if I raise the question of literary history, it is

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not merely to urge its importance as an intellectual discipline or to deplore the absence of methodological thinking in that area. There are just too many areas in which one could be thinking more clearly and generously. My argument will be that literary history is necessary less for the sake of intellect than for the sake of literature; it is our "historical duty" because it alone can provide today a sorely needed defense of art.

Since Aristotle, the best defense of art has been to call it "more philosophical" than history. Despite recent advances in sociology, literature continues to escape historical research at some point. To demonstrate, as Lucien Goldmann has done, that the dramas of Racine participate in the public thought of his time, that there is nothing in his plays not illuminated by the conflict within church or state, is a significant authentification of the reality principle guiding even the most abstract or stylized art, and a cogent reminder that literature is never as self-centered as it seems to be.[4] But the influence of Racine, the continuing resonance of his language and form, even for those who do not know of the topical historical issues, remains unclarified. There exists, in other words, a principle of authority in art that is purely authorial: It seems to derive from art alone or from the author's genius rather than from the genius of his age. Werner Krauss, troubled by this characteristic autonomy of literature, by this "capacity of art-forms to outlast the destined hour," admits that Marxist theory has not been able to understand the phenomenon. Whether or not poetry is more philosophical than history, it is more formal: That is the brute yet elegant fact that we must appreciate without falling into idealistic or unhistorical explanations.

Thus the formality of art becomes a central issue in any literary history. How do we ground art in history without denying its autonomy, its aristocratic resistance to the tooth of time? Is it not a monument rather than a document; a monument, moreover, of the soul's magnificence, and so a richly solipsistic or playful edifice?

To understand the "art" in art is always essential. But it is even more essential today, for we have clearly entered an "era of suspicion" in which art seems arty to the artist himself. The artist, indeed, is often the severest critic of his own medium which turns against itself in his relentless drive for self-criticism. Artistic form and aesthetic illusion are today treated as "ideologies" to be exposed and demystified; this has long been true on the Continent, where Marxism is part of the intellectual milieu, but it is also becoming

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true of America. If literary history is to provide a new defense of art, it must now defend the artist against himself as well as against his other detractors. It must help to restore his faith in two things: in form and in his historical vocation.

Toward a Theory of Form

It may seem strange, this suggestion that we suffer at present from a shame of form. But the modern insistence on process, on openness, on mixed media, and especially on the mingling of personal and technological elements indicates more than the usual difficulty with inherited patterns or the desire to "make it new." The older way of achieving a form impersonal enough to allow the new to emerge was to subordinate the individual talent to the tradition. Eliot still thought it possible. Then what is wrong with the old forms? Why do they appear less exciting, less viable—even less "pure"—than mixed or technological forms? Take the example of a man from whom Eliot learned his craft: No one was more interested in purity of form, or form as such, than Ezra Pound. Yet Pound's *Cantos,* which ransack the high culture of both West and East, remain a nostalgic montage without unity, a picaresque of styles.

We look back at Pound and Eliot,[5] at Bridges and Yeats, and we realize that their elitist view of culture is dead. Though their art aimed for the genuine vernacular, it could not resist the appeal of forms associated with high culture, forms that remained an "ideological" reflex of upper-class mentality. To purge this ideological stain, and to rescue art from the imputation of artiness, the writer had to become his own enemy. Today all art stands in a questionable relation to elite modes of thought and feeling. But while the artist moves closer to self-criticism, the critic moves closer to art by expanding the notion of form until it cannot be narrowly linked to the concerns of a priestly culture or its mid-cult imitations.

I want to examine modern criticism in the light of this tendency. Is there a larger conception of literary form in the making? There are four significant theories to be considered: first, Marxist criticism, which raises explicitly the issue of elitism; then Frye's theory of archetypes; and finally two kinds of structuralist theory, that of C. Lévi-Strauss, and that of I. A. Richards and the Anglo-American critics. I hope to persuade you that an important new theory of form is gradually emerging.

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Let me illustrate the Marxist preoccupation with form by a work of art that provides its own critical perspective. Jean-Luc Godard's *Weekend* is cinematic self-criticism of an extreme kind. The title of the film points to the theme of leisure or, rather, of "ignoble leisure"; and Godard engages in the film on a ruthless violation of taboos, especially the "taboo" of form. Not only are the unities of time, place, and action killed once again, or rather parodied to death, but just about every art-movie cliché, from the films of Antonioni, Fellini, Bunuel, Resnais, Truffaut—and Godard himself—is exposed to massive lyrical ridicule. The result is strangely operatic, since opera tends to be pure superstructure, its form having but an absurd or magical connection with the passions staged. The Antonioni promenade, the Fellini harlequinade, the Bonnie-and-Clyde relationship, the Truffaut tenderness, the Bunuelian symbols—everything is mocked in this bloody, endlessly interrupted pastoral.

What remains? It is the problem of the elitist status of art, expressed in powerful visual graffiti. One scene shows a truck-driver playing Mozart on a huge concert-piano that has somehow found its way into a farmyard. Various laborers and old peasant women seem as entranced by that music as the beasts were by Orpheus. It is Godard's gentlest scene, but also the most mocking vis-à-vis the Marxist theory of a proletariat pastoral. What reconciliation is possible between Mozart, the proletariat *régisseur,* and the barnyard setting? "What are the conditions," asks Werner Krauss, "which compel a break-through from the base (*Unterbau*) of society and which might rectify its relation to the superstructure (*Überbau*)? In what way can literature belong to the superstructure of society?"[6] There is nothing that belongs authentically to either the social base or superstructure in Godard's mise-en-scène. We are left with a few lyrical images of old women who seem to listen to the incongruous music and a farmhand walking to its rhythm and yet not to its rhythm. All the rest is—ideology.

If we insert this film into a history of the concept of form, we would have to say that, for Godard, form was less important than its violation. He writes about the problem of form in blood—in the life-blood of his medium. He hopes that by violating all taboos something deeper than the gratuitous values of a leisure class might emerge: real pastoral values, perhaps; something from the *Unterbau* or Marxist "deep structure." Yet this movie, which begins as sophisticated pornography, ends with a totally undelicious scene

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of anthropophagy: a progress which suggests that to destroy through revolution or some other mode of cleansing the forms of our high culture will simply result in primitivism, in the naked substructure. We are therefore forced to consider a second reason for Godard's violation of taboos. The movie medium, instead of discovering new values, is shown to participate necessarily in the old values, in the capitalistic desire for conspicuous consumption. All the totems of movie culture are therefore offered up to the reluctant viewer in this moveable feast which is like the massacre of materiél in American spectaculars. To go beyond this movie means to go beyond a movie-centered culture and no longer to confuse participation with consumption.

We come away from Godard with two observations about the authenticity of art forms in contemporary society. The first is that the only forms that all classes of society enjoy are primitivistic; the second, that the most we can expect from art is not authenticity but purity—the fissure of the work of art into ideology on the one hand and pure form on the other. Godard's "alienation-effects" are more Mallarmean than Brechtean and substantiate the view that poetry is detachable from a more continuous prose base. Thus form remains a lyrical and dying effect, a falling star in the twilight of taboos.

The theory of form advanced by Northrop Frye is more familiar. He removes the elitism of the art object by pointing to similarities between the structure of primitive myths and the formal principles of all art. The structure of a sophisticated novel by Henry James or Virginia Woolf is like that of any story; and the historical difference between stories is due to what Frye calls the displacement of myth, that is, its accommodation to rules of verisimilitude that differ for different cultures. In a culture, for example, that is "realistic," a writer cannot depict supernatural figures directly, yet he invents characters with daemonic attributes or with the capacity for violating social norms. Thus Frye can talk of the pharmakos or sacred scapegoat in Virginia Woolf and Henry James; and Ihab Hassan expands that insight to cover a broad range of modern works in *Radical Innocence.*

The virtue of Frye's system is that it methodically removes the one barrier that prevents art from exerting wide influence: the distinction of kind between sacred and secular, or between popular and highbrow. His sense for the commonality of art is radically Protestant: Every man is imagination's priest. All art that is good

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expands imagination; all art that is bad restricts it. Mystery and its brood—secret religion, secret sex, secret government—are simply imagination gone bad. For Frye as for Blake, bad art argues a sick society, one that has the power to block our imagination. And the blocking agent is always a priesthood: some political or religious or artistic elite.

It is clear that Frye's theory has affinities with Marxist thought. But the latter is more dialectical and realistic in its view of history. Where Marxist critics confront the individual work and evaluate it according to its struggle with the proletariat-elite, base-superstructure split, Frye's structural observations are developed for descriptive and not for evaluative purposes. His idea of literary history is certainly abstract: not only less sweaty than Marxist literary history, but also less concrete than most scholarly versions. Though he expands our concept of form and redeems individual works from the isolation imposed on them by cult and culture, he may do so at the cost of a false idea of universality and an elite idea of literary history. The illusion that a world-wide culture is already within reach is fostered by evading the question of national difference and large-scale social (East-West) conflict. I suspect that for the Marxist his vision of cultural dissemination is a technocrat's ideal and betrays an American perspective. Werner Krauss would surely commend Frye, as he does other American scholars, for his "radical break with all monopolistic attitudes in the writing of literary history," but he would also criticize a method that bypasses national or ideological differences till literature becomes an "All-Souls, in which Cervantes and Rabelais, Dante and Voltaire, amicably drink tea together."[7] It is, in short, bad comparative literature.

We return later to this problem of how the nationality of literatures is to be respected; but it is important to add that Frye writes about criticism rather than about literature, and he seems more interested in improving the consumer than in evaluating the product. His whole effort is an attempt to improve the public relations of art. His vision of an expanding cultural universe includes literary works, but they are not the reified apples of his eye. On the contrary, he is less interested in the marmoreal object than in a change of perception from which the object would profit. To Eliot's thesis that the advent of the authentically new work of art revises our view of all preceding works, Frye adds an important footnote: This change is a change in our consciousness of art and can only

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occur, therefore, if mediated by criticism. Whatever totemic or elitist elements remain in the literary work, this interplay between art and critic, between product and consumer, expands both and anticipates the Marxist hope (itself a version of Christian communism elaborated around the time of Blake, Ballanche, and Saint-Simon)[8] that the forms of social life dissolve into the form of man—into the expanding humanistic consciousness of a classless society.

It is, hence, a question whether Frye is dealing with "form" at all. He seems to approach the concept of "structure" with which structuralism (the third of our theories) is concerned. This structure is a mental fact and supposedly intersubjective: common to every man as man, to priest and peasant, sophisticate and primitive. The shift in linguistics from individual languages (or sign-systems) to language in general (or semeiotics) and from there to structures of the mind parallels Frye's shift from the individual work of art to literature as a totality and from there to a "verbal universe" which exhibits archetypes basic to science as well. Yet the "structures" isolated by Claude Lévi-Strauss differ from Frye's in an essential respect. They are solutions to real social problems—which is why structuralism can call itself a science, a *science humaine*. The principles of structure described by Frye solve a problem only in the sense that they free art from the stigma of archaism or elitism, and so publish it once again. Tradition is ex-tradition; art must become transitive vis-à-vis its original site in history. Frye teaches us a lot about tradition, handing-on, but less about what is handed on. He fails to bring together the form of art and the form of its historical consciousness—which is the ideal of the science we seek.

Claude Lévi-Strauss also fails in this, but he does bring together the form of myth and a kind of *social* consciousness. Myth, according to him, resolves a societal hang-up or articulates its solution. Since every society has conflicts of interest that cannot be resolved without great mental anxiety, every society will have its myths. If all myths use the same basic method to resolve these social conflicts, then a science of myth would be possible. And this possibility is the claim of anthropological structuralism.

Let us look more closely at the structuralist's description of myth. The form of myth is always twofold: Its surface structure reflects local traditions and may be esoteric, but its deep structure is logical and can be formulated in mathematical terms. Myths dealing with the incest taboo, for example, should project in their

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totality a theory of kinship that makes it clear that the generative problem is how to distribute women fairly—how to pry them loose from father or clan and make them "go around." The incest taboo, therefore, is neither absolute nor eternal, but a humane and logical institution, part of a system of exchange as complex as the monetary system today.

Here, as in Frye, myth is both story and a principle of structure: a primitive narrative and a functional type of logic. Myth and mathematics join in a mysterious way more reminiscent of Plato than Aristotle. What is lacking in this description is precisely the middle-ground between myth and mathematics that art occupies. Where in this description are the qualities of story-telling that actually involve us—tone, rhythm, humor, surprises, and displacements? A sense of hidden structure or a delight in exotic surface is only a part of this involvement. Surely, even if literature proves to be a problem-solving form, it must be of a more liberal and chancy kind than Claude Lévi-Strauss suggests. And since, for Lévi-Strauss, form is totally explained by its social function, we cannot ask which myths are viable universals and which empty or chauvinistic versions of what Blake called "the Human Abstract." The structuralist science of myth does not allow us to cross over from its theory of form to a descriptive or critical account of the artist's historical consciousness.

Our last theory, and in many ways the one most clearly focused on the literary work, is that of I. A. Richards and the New Criticism. Richards' concept of form is as functional as that of Lévi-Strauss, and it may have a common source with the latter in Malinowski.[9] What ritual, according to Malinowski, does for primitive societies, literary form, in Richards, does for the civilized (and perhaps over-civilized) individual; it reconciles tensions and helps to unify. Richards, however, does not specify what the basic tensions or "hang-ups" are. He is content with the commonsense observation that tensions always exist and that the deeper they are and the more complexly respectful of them the reconciling form, the better the work of art or the harmony of the person. We seem to have a very open theory of form that defines neither the contents reconciled nor the exact, perhaps organic, structure by which they are unified.

This theory is open, except for the very insistence on unity or reconciliation, which has become a great shibboleth developed by the New Critics on the basis of Eliot and Richards. Only Empson tried

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to escape it by postulating "types" of ambiguity which showed how precarious this unity was, or how rebellious language. It is important not to be deceived by the sophisticated vagueness of such terms as "unity," "complexity," "maturity," and "coherence," which enter criticism at this point. They are code words shored against the ruins. They express a highly neoclassical and acculturated attitude, a quiet nostalgia for the ordered life, and a secret recoil from aggressive ideologies, substitute religions, and dogmatic concepts of order. Out of the passionate intensity of the post-war period, out of the pressures of politics, press, and propaganda comes a thoughtful backlash that attempts to distinguish the suasion of literary statements from more imperative kinds. A poem, we learn, does not "mean," but "is"; art, we are told, is pseudo-statement or pseudo-action. Thus the literary work, though nominally democratic—inclusive of anything—is thought of as exclusive by its structure. Art turns out to be a mental purification of the impulses to action: an idea that has eastern resonances in I. A. Richards, but is associated in Cleanth Brooks with testing the simplifications by which we live.

Richards' concept of the functional unity of the work of art is far from narrow, of course. By modeling it on the psychology of communication, which includes reader or auditor in the aesthetic transaction, he opened a path to a theory of participatory form and helped to revive the academic interest in rhetoric still important today when new and sophisticated notions concerning the "entrapment" of reader by writer are emerging. He may also have influenced Kenneth Burke's refusal to equate rhetorical forms with aristocratic or privileged ideas of order and to examine anew both their psychological function and social-participatory (Burke continues to call it "ritual") aspect. Sigurd Burkhardt's emphasis on the "troth-value" of words is a further echo of these explorations.[10]

There is, nevertheless, the distinct afterglow of an elitist idea of culture in Richards' work. The function of art moves closer to that of ordinary language and normal psychological transactions, but it remains reminiscent of Plato's "dialectic." Art's therapeutic virtue is to Richards what the intellectual virtue of dialectic was to Socrates: Purging fixed ideas, it still leads upward to the one form of truth. The Socratic assumption, moreover, of a basic identity of questioner and questioned evades the issue of class or nationality —it assumes a society of equals whose upward mobility is intellectual in essence. Join Plato's dialectic to communications theory, and you get the idea of art as an elite communications medium.

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What you do not get is a concrete understanding of how this medium mediates: of how in history it actually reconciles or unifies different persuasions. For this we need quite another kind of dialectic, which Hegel and Marx tried to develop. We still have not found a theory linking the form of the medium to the form of the artist's historical consciousness.

Toward a Theory of Literary Vocation

It is time I showed my hand and proposed such a theory. Let us construct it on the basis that literary form is functional and that its function is to keep us functioning, to help us resolve certain "hang-ups" and bring life into harmony with itself. But let us also agree that art can divide as well as heal and that its healing power may be complicated by its power to hurt. Wordsworth, in the "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," defines the poet as one who "considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and reacting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure." Art cannot be expected to "bring us together again" by metaphysic, by an occult virtue of unification.

Since we are looking for a theory of *literary* as well as *functional* form, the essential ingredient is whatever makes the theory specifically relevant to literature. Otherwise we might quote Housman's "For Malt does more than Milton can/To justify the ways of God to Man," and leave it at that. But are there perhaps specifically *literary* hang-ups? And are we not forced by this question into the psychology of art on the one hand, but also into an analysis of literary history on the other?

Take the contemporary situation. Many artists today doubt art to the point of becoming incapable of it. The reason for their extreme self-questioning has already been suggested. The artist has a bad conscience because of the idea that forms, structures, and so on always reconcile or integrate, that they are conservative despite themselves. To create a truly iconoclastic art, a structure-breaking art, to change the function of form from reconciliation and conservation to rebellion, and so to participate in the enormity of present experience—this is the one Promethean aim still fiery enough to inspire. It is the psychic state of art today. But let us think, in addition, about other periods. Is the problem of the present era unique or a special case of a more inherent, perhaps universal

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dilemma besetting the writer's consciousness of himself? Were not Keats and Milton, those great formalists, also great iconoclasts, and did they not think about the historical vocation of art?

Pursuing this question we come on the probability that no great writer is without an identity crisis. The shape of that crisis can be generalized. Though we may not always discern what developmental impasse occurs within the poet's private life, we can describe the vocational crisis that occurs in the poet as poet, in his literary self-consciousness. No great artist is without the ambition to seize (and hand on) the flame of inspiration, to identify the genius of art with his own genius or that of a particular age (*genius loci*). But this is the crisis of self-consciousness in its purity: of emergence and commitment to being manifestly what one is. In the modern era with its problem of "legitimacy," the artist is especially aware of the need for self-justification.[11] The basic problem, however, is as old as history: How is spiritual authority to be transmitted if not through an elite of persons or communities? There seems to be no *recorded* greatness without the driving force of an idea of election or the search for evidences of election.

All societies have rituals for the passage out of latency and into the public light. They seek to guide it and to assure the individual a formal maturity. Van Gennep, who studied these ceremonies, called them *"rites de passage."* His findings have a complex but real bearing on the function of literature, whether in society or in the individual consciousness of artists. Take Shakespeare's Hamlet, a figure that has fascinated generations. It is widely agreed that an important function of art is to create character-types of universal or general appeal, and that Hamlet is the type of a man deprived of typical existence: of vocation or role or the possibility of commitment. The paradox, a simple one, is clarified by reference to Van Gennep: Hamlet is *"le seigneur latent qui ne peut devenir"* (Mallarmé) because he cannot assume his real (regal) self by innocent means—by the formal rite. Ceremony itself, in its legal and ludic aspects, in its justifying and mediating functions, is wounded. Deprived of kingship and shunning the outlaw role of avenger, Hamlet is doomed to remain a liminal person in an action (the play) that is an abortive rite of passage. He becomes the "juvenile shadow of us all" in his psychic struggle with *"le mal d'apparaître."*[12]

Yet every artist is like Hamlet. The artist must always find his own way to "appear"; he has no ritual to guide him. The presump-

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tion of his act, the daring of his art is all. The conventions at his disposal do not lessen the agony of self-election: If he admires the ancients, he trembles to rival them; if he does not admire, he trembles before a void he must fill. No wonder art continually questions the hopes for art; no wonder also that it endures irony and negativity to the point of substantiating Yeats's comment, so appropriate to Mallarmé: "The last kiss is given to the void."

The plea for literary history merges here with that for phenomenology or consciousness studied in its effort to "appear." Consciousness can try to objectify itself, to disappear into its appearances, or to make itself *as* consciousness the vocation. Social anthropology is involved because rites of acculturation and the structure of public life provide many of the collective forms that could allow self-objectification. Indeed, the very multiplicity of terms used to characterize the dynamics of phenomenology (appearance, manifestation, individuation, emergence, being-in-the-world, and so forth) imply a concern that incorporates the human sciences, or all sciences to the extent that they are humane. This concern centers on the problem of "civilization" and encompasses both nature and nurture, "those frontiers of biology and sociology from which mankind derives its hidden strength."[13] We have only to look at the crisis point in Keats's *Hyperion* to see this struggle for "appearance" accompanied by all the suggestiveness that hidden frontiers bestow.

In the third book of *Hyperion*, Apollo, the young sun-god, attempts to rise—to emerge into himself helped by the memory-goddess, Mnemosyne. The sun never rises, however; *Hyperion* begins and ends in twilight. While attempting to dawn, Apollo suffers pangs like those accompanying childbirth or sexual climax or the biomorphic passage from one state of being to another. His "fierce convulse" is comparable to that of the snake Lamia in her transformation to womanhood (*Lamia,* Part I, 145 ff). We expect Apollo to become the sun: "from all his limbs/Celestial" a new dawn will break. But the poem breaks off, as if Apollo's metamorphosis had tied itself into a knot and entered a developmental impasse. Though the impasse cannot be reduced to ego psychology —it is clearly related to the Enlightenment assumption of a "progress" of religion and literature—Apollo, in bringing his identity to light, is also bringing his father to light. In the psychotheology of art, as Keats depicts it here, the ephebe god, under the influence of "knowledge enormous," is about to replace the sun-god Hyperion.

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To bring his identity to light means to bear a father-god *out of himself*. The poem stops on that uncanny yet familiar truth.

To stress the "phenomenological" dimension is not to transcend the "literary" aspect. Apollo is the god of art by traditional equation. The knowledge that floods him,

> Names, deeds, gray legends, dire events, rebellions,
> Majesties, sovran voices, agonies.
> Creations and destroyings . . .

is "epic" knowledge, mediated by literature or by Mnemosyne as mother of the Muses. It signals the change from a lower to a higher mode of consciousness, from pastoral romance to that kind of heroic verse which *Hyperion* seeks to be. Yet Keats does not succeed in passing from pastoral to epic any more than Apollo does from ephebe state to Phoebus. What he writes is *hot pastoral* rather than epic. The very rituals that wing him into a new sphere prove too literary, too magical-archaic, and do not prevent fresh anxieties about the authenticity of his "passage." The marble steps the dreamer barely ascends in *The Fall of Hyperion* or Moneta's face "deathward progressing / To no death" are images raised up by his anxiety. Literature is breaking with an archaic mode that has been its glory and remains influential; yet the very idea of ritual transition is part of this archaism and makes the poet aware of his lateness or inauthenticity. His art, a new star, finds itself in the arms of the old by a fatal if fine repetition.

The impasse, then, is that Keats believes in poetry, in its "progressive" character, yet cannot see an authentic catena between old and new. In a sense *he* is the catena and his art the "passage." The past masters haunt him: Their glory is his guilt. The burden of *traditio*[14] leads to a preoccupation with *transitio*, and transition has two very different aspects in Keats. It may infer a real passing-over, a transcendence of past stages enabled by the "grand march of intellect"—Keats's phrase for the Enlightenment. Wordsworth, he speculates, thinks more deeply into the human heart than Milton, whether or not he is a greater poet. Transition can also, however, infer the obverse of transcendenc : transience, or abiding the *consciousness* of change by "negative capability." That is the real test of the fallen gods in *Hyperion*, by which they become human. All rites lead only to further "dark passages" and not beyond. "We are in a Mist—*We* are now in that state." If the first aspect of the idea of transition requires a philoso-

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phy of history, the second elicits the watchword, "The creative must create itself." "The Genius of poetry," Keats also says, "must work its own salvation in a man."

We are close to the era that makes transition a historiographical concept, as in "The Age of Transition." But this concept is a compromise and belies the rich gloom of Keats's verse. While he fails to place us where we can see the historical vocation of poetry, he does somehow transmit deeply, feelingly, an existential or temporal consciousness. This is not only by the sensuous or empathic highpoints of his art. His famed sensuousness exists as one pole in this temporal rhythm, the other being the mind's irritable, positivistic "reaching after fact and reason." A sharp revolution of tempi or moods, the alternation of an overwrought questing with "silence and slow time," is what catches us. In the odes, which traditionally permit bold transitions, this is less remarkable than in the *Hyperion*. Moments before Mnemosyne brings Apollo to the flood-stage of recollection, he is steeped in forgetful, even indolent sensation. ("Beside the osiers of a rivulet / Full ankle-deep in lilies of the vale. . . .") This direct, precipitous transition from puberty to epiphany, from pastoral to apocalypse—which aborts historical vision proper—puts all progress by "stages" in doubt.

What remains is almost purely existential: a birth which is a forgetting, and a dying into recollection. But the poetry also remains and the question of its relation to this "existential metaphysics." There is a metaphysical element, because Apollo "dies" into an ante-life by a kind of platonic anamnesis. On examination, however, this ante-life proves to be Wordsworth, Milton, Spenser, the Bible, Plato . . . the *paradise of poets*.[15] Keats is not less a humanist for being visionary; what pre-exists is not metaphysical or transcendent of life, but souls that are logoi, "sovran voices" mediated by each great poet. So Milton "descends" into Keats: Apollo's birth is predicated on an overcoming of the father-gods just as in *Paradise Lost* (itself "descended" from Biblical tradition) Adam's birth presupposes the fall of the angels. The fledgling god's dying into the life of recollection is, similarly, comparable to Adam's falling into knowledge or the ambiguous career of the soul in Wordsworth's "Intimation Ode," its humanizing passage from a birth that is "a sleep and a forgetting" to the compensating radiance of the philosophic mind. Keats's invention trails clouds of glory. It is itself a recollection, or anamnesis, which either justifies or devours the literary identity of its poet.

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Genius, genius, and genius loci

On the surface there is some naivete in claiming that literary history should be written from the point of view of the poets or of poetry. It is like saying naval history should be written from the point of view of sailors or ships. Hence it becomes important to stress the relatedness of the literary and the phenomenological points of view, as is implied by the previous section. The artist's struggle with his vocation—with past masters and the "pastness" of art in modern society—seems to be a version of a universal human struggle: of genius with Genius, and of genius with the *genius loci* (spirit of place).

It is always hard to defend the analytic categories one chooses. I have found the above terms useful and flexible. They have some kinship, obviously, with race, milieu, and moment, but they are free of special sociological meaning and may be as old as Western religion. A study of their history and prevalence must still be made,[16] but I would guess that the *genius loci* concept, at least, becomes visible with the nationalization of culture in Roman times and the revival of literary nationalism in the modern period. It also appears, from very preliminary observations, that whatever credence was given to the *genius loci* as a myth, it was an important principle of structure or an informing idea in literature and art from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries. One reason for its importance (to which I will return) is that it helped to mediate the conflict between the universal and nationalistic aspirations of art.[17]

In general, the artist's struggle with past masters corresponds to the struggle of genius with Genius, and his anxiety about the outmodedness of art to his anxiety about the genius of his country or time. To begin with the genius/Genius contest: This opposes, or conjoins, the personal "ingenium" in its unmediated, forgetful vigor, and the starry guide whose influence accompanies us from birth,[18] but is revealed mainly at crucial—"historical" or "self-conscious"—junctures. The contest is like that of Jacob with the Angel, which results in a name (or a new name), one that is generic as well as personal. In the Romantic period, Genius appears to genius as Memory: as an internalized guardian self or fateful shadow. This is as true of Hegel as it is of Wordsworth and Keats.[19] But in every period something pre-exists: original sin, or the world of the fathers, or Plato's Ideas or Husserl's *Ideen,* or the mythic forms of *illud tempus.* And in every period there is an *ingénu* to be tested

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by vision, to be lead out of the state of natural light by a Muse who opens an "everlasting scryne" where the "antique rolles" (rôles and scrolls) lie hidden.

To restrict literary or cultural history to the genius/Genius relation skirts two errors. One is that art is seen as a puberty rite or adolescent crisis, localized in personal time even if recurring periodically. The other is that art becomes the story of Humanity, in which Genius appears as a hero with a thousand faces (and therefore no face, like the ecumenical God) pursuing a gnostic odyssey. Much literary biography or existential criticism falls prey to the first, most myth-criticism to the second error. These errors, however, are fruitful and complementary. We must manage to embrace both; only singly do they lead to an impoverishment in our understanding of art. Apollo's crisis, for example, is clearly that of adolescence. He has left the "chamber of Maiden-Thought" and hovers darkling between ephebic state and godhead. He is at once too young and too old: The middle state is what is obscure, and to emerge from it as a decisive, individuated being, there may have to be something equivalent to infanticide or parricide. His metamorphosis can only be toward pure youth (and the mythic figure of the divine child) or pure eld (the divine *senex*) or theriomorphic (and the figure, for example, of the snake). But these are the very transformations studied by gnostic or myth-critical thought. The philosophers of individuation, from Plotinus through the modern school of Jung and Newmann, reveal how improbable it is for anyone to become truly individual, having wrestled with Genius and received the blessing and curse of identity.

Yet a poet is even more—because more *inobviously*—besieged than they describe. The dramatic encounter of genius with Genius is accompanied by the commonplace quarrel of genius with *genius loci:* of art with the natural religion or dominant myth of its age. To the burden of vision which rouses the poet's sense of his powers is added a combat with insidious habits of thought or perception. "Reasonings like vast Serpents/ Infold around my limbs, bruising my minute articulations" (Blake). "A weight/ Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life" (Wordsworth). The *genius loci* can rival Genius as an influence, for it suggests the possibility of a more "natural" (unselfconscious) participation in a pre-existent or larger self. England as Gloriana or America as Virgin Land is a visionary commonplace indistinguishable from an "idol of the tribe" or "collective representation."[20] Though bounded by period

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and place, the *genius loci* is as all-pervasive in its domain as a climate of opinion—which makes it harder to confront than a Mnemosyne. What arms does one take up against a *spirit*? Who will challenge a temperament, tilt with a weather? It is as absurd as the Beatles fighting the Blue Meanies: They try the solvent of music, but their true arms, one suspects, are counter-visionary, obliging the enemy to recrudesce by pop or parody art. One best engages the lurking, many-headed *topoi* or fixed ideas of a culture by sending against them their own image, enlarged and purified. "Bring me my chariot of fire." This is still a *topos*, but more than commonplace. We see the spirited form, not the nebulous. The imagery of the tribe is given bounding outline, the imaginative vigor of national prejudices acknowledged and faced.

Should there be conflict in an artist between *genius loci* and Genius, it takes the form of humanity versus nation or local integrities versus abstract conceptions or art itself versus party allegiance. In the case of Keats, there is evidence that *Hyperion* was meant to depict a geopolitical "progress of poetry" from Antiquity to modern England. The "beautiful mythology of Greece" was to have been revived or rivaled by "home-bred glory"—by the "Sister of the Island," as Keats calls the muse of his native land in *Endymion* IV. This is the context of the poet's famous, formalistic-sounding statement that "English ought to be kept up." A contradiction remained (as also in Blake) between the Genius of Poetry and the national genius. Keats thought Milton had shown the way to their reconciliation, and he began *Hyperion* in that belief, but he eventually put Chatterton's "English Idiom in English words" against Milton's "artful or rather artist's humour." There are always, it seems, two genii fighting for the soul of the artist: two stars or visions of destiny, or Genius and the *genius loci*.

Starry persons, of course, are an inveterate poetical superstition, and the astrology of genius revives explicitly in Yeats' *Vision*, but all literary judgment, insofar as it is historical, adjudicates the claims of Genius and *genius loci*. Here is Michelet on the greatness of Rabelais:

> Rabelais collected wisdom from the old, popular idioms, from sayings, proverbs, school farces in the mouth of fools and clowns. But mediated by follies of this kind the genius of the age and its prophetic power are revealed in their majesty. Where he does not reveal, he glimpses, he promises, he guides. In this forest of dreams, one can see under each leaf fruits which the future will harvest. The entire book is a golden bough.[21]

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Compare this with Bronson Alcott, Thoreau's friend, praising *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* as "purely American, fragrant with the lives of New England woods and streams, and which could have been written nowhere else," then because "the sod and sap and flavor of New England have found at last a clear relation to the literature of other and classic lands . . . Egypt, India, Greece, England." Alcott seems more interested than Michelet in harmonizing native and classical *genii loci*, but when he adds that "Especially am I touched by this soundness, this aboriginal vigour, as if a man had once more come into Nature,"[22] he appeals beyond the *genius loci* to the genius of the artist in its unmediated relation to Nature.

The *genius loci* is especially significant for modern, that is, vernacular art, for it is then that the assertion of a national genius becomes vital, and a Dante, Ariosto, or Milton turn to the "adorning of their native Tongue." Native and national are not always identical, of course; and this, in the Renaissance, is part of the general problem of constructing a "national universal" from the genius of different localities. In Rabelais, Panurge at one point answers Pantagruel in seven languages, two of which are nonexistent; and Bakhtin has shown how this problematic abundance of linguistic "masks" fosters a peculiarly modern awareness of concrete historic space.[23] The literary self-consciousness of the modern era is intimately linked to a reflection on the fall of culture into nationality and its redemption into a new universality.

Finding a more "concrete" universal, one with truly national or native roots, proves to be, in the Renaissance, a highly liberative and creative endeavor. In Rabelais, Cervantes, and Shakespeare, those vernacular giants, popular culture joins the learned muses. The neoclassical or purist reaction merely showed how these giants traumatized later writers. Even before Shakespeare, Gabriel Harvey had doubts about Spenser—hardly a pop artist, yet to the genteel he seemed "hobgoblin run away with the garland from Apollo." With the signal exception of France, which identified culture once more with the purification of language and the achieving of a new latinity—an ideal that dominated Europe from about 1660 to 1760—Apollo retrieved his garland by hobnobbing with hobgoblin. If literary creativity becomes problematic toward the end of the eighteenth century, it is not because of a sudden mysterious uncertainty about the vocation of the artist, but on the contrary, because that vocation, in the light of the failure of French universal-

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ism, is only too clear. An intensely programmatic consciousness arises that defines the vocation of literature as *Art seeking Pop* —art seeking its father-figure in folk culture. Genius merges confusingly with *genius loci* as *Volksboden* or autochthonous art. We see this most clearly among the German and English Romantics. In the 1770's Herder wrote an influential essay attributing his nation's literary poverty to the fact that, unlike England, it had produced no poets to revitalize the learned muse by bringing folklore into the mainstream of art. Where are *our* Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakespeare? he asks. Or, as Keats will say: "Let us have the old poets, and Robin Hood."[24]

There is, then, a model that haunts the consciousness of vernacular artists. The "vegetable gold" of great art is to bring Sancho Panza into relation with Don Quixote. Patrician and plebeian are to be fellow-travellers, part of the same human family. Genius, in expelling a false or discovering a true *genius loci,* discovers itself and enlarges us.

In our own day, this model is often dangerously simplified. Art, we are told, seeks to revitalize, and, if need be, rebarbarize man. There must be contact with devil or drug or forbidden areas. Thomas Mann's *Dr. Faustus* is the definitive expression—and critique—of that simplification. Yet, simplified or not, this model for creativity becomes an animating force, a psychic silhouette with which the artist strives to coincide. There is also a counter-model, inspired by the French tradition, in which art seeks to purify *"les mots de la tribu."* Both models, however, are functions of the rise of the national literatures. The nationalization of art is a cultural analogue of the Fall (perhaps a fortunate Fall)[25]; and true literary history, like true theology, can help to limit the curse and assure the promise. At least it makes us honor the paradoxes of an era in which the tenth Muse is Pop.

Milton as Example: Form and the Historical Vocation of Art

Milton's *Arcades* is a version of pastoral Empson left unexamined and which Godard might enjoy. It is hard to imagine a piece more elite in conception than this courtly interlude. A pastoral in little, it depicts the unmasking of shepherds as noble primitives. An opera in little, it is all opsis, like the tableaux vivants, the staged devices common from Elizabeth's time. A drama in little, its action is a single recognition, complete in the first stanza of the first song,

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and confirmed by the Genius of the Wood. As this sophisticated mixture of genres—pastoral, drama, and masque—it tends in its contracted yet leisurely form toward a fourth and undermining genre. Composed of but three songs and the "recitative" of the *genius loci*, the lyrical form of an ode clearly appears. If genres here, in their very multiplicity, their very formality, are the superstructure, the deep structure is nothing less than the spirit of song itself, questing like the "secret sluice" of Arethusa for a new country or local form, which turns out to be England—that is, the possibility of a truly native lyricism.

Arcades begins with the fulfilment of a quest:

> Look Nymph and Shepherds look
> What sudden blaze of majesty
> Is that which we from hence descry
> Too divine to be mistook
> This, this is she. . . .

The cry practically ends the action: "here our solemn search hath end." It is the formal sign of an epiphany or theophany, of a "present deity" being revealed. It is a show-cry, the equivalent of the Lo, Behold, O see. But who is this new god? A lady of seventy, the Countess Dowager of Derby. The whole thing seems to be an extravagant courtly compliment; and after the Genius of the Wood has confirmed the perception of these displaced magi as well as acknowledged their own "bright honour," the piece concludes by inviting us to attest that a new deity has been found, one who makes England a greater Arcady.

Is there in this spectacle more than meets the eye? Is the compliment all that extravagant, the form all that gratuitous? The setting is not only the estate of a noble Lady but the English countryside, and the masque was probably performed in the open air. Although Milton's literary code is classical and the allusions italianate, the plot, what there is of it, depicts a journey from a southern to a northern Arcadia and the discovery that England, despite its dank climate, has deities worth celebrating:

> Who had thought this clime had held
> A deity so unparallel'd?

In the last song of the masque, the Dowager Countess is directly identified with a transcendent nature-spirit, the *genius huius loci:*

> Here ye shall have greater grace
> To serve the Lady of this place.

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These words invite the nature-spirits haunting more classical shores to emigrate and grace the English countryside. "A better soil shall give ye thanks." Thus Milton's *Arcades* is really a farewell to Arcades, a "we'll to [Italian] woods no more," or "we'll to Fresh woods, and Pastures new." It is a nativity hymn for English nature-poetry, in which nymphs, shepherds, and the *genius loci* make their formal submission.

Milton's simple sooth is never simple. The real discovery here is that of a pastoral within a pastoral. The old gods, the old forms—the elite superstructure—must serve a "rural Queen" identified with the *genius loci* of England. But is it not ridiculous to make of this septagenarian Dowager a new Gloriana? Is what we find here the authentic expression of a national idea of poetry or its misuse as a courtly compliment? Is not *Arcades* at most *dirigisme, Kulturlenkung,* rather than poetry grappling authentically with the spirit of English history and countryside?

It is a question I want to explore rather than answer. If the Countess of Derby is a personal patron, she is also, not without authority, a patroness of English poetry as a whole, being a distant relative of Edmund Spenser and appearing as Amaryllis in "Colin Clout Comes Home Again." Spenser's homecoming, of course, was bitter: Promises of "chere of court" were not fulfilled. He used the pastoral disguise of Colin Clout as a topos of modesty, but also took secret pride in his resumption of vernacular poetry. Milton's version of pastoral foresees Spenser's redemption and a true homecoming of the spirit of poetry to England. He associates the aristocracy with the poet's game: The unmasking of artificial shepherds as guardians of the realm (nobles) also unmasks the simple sooth of his poetry as not so simple, as having a tutelary function and lineage as old as theirs. Poetry's tutelary function appears even more clearly in *Comus,* Milton's second pastoral masque, which introduces young aristocrats both to society and the truth of fable.

Thus, by glorifying the lineage of the Countess, Milton at the same time glorifies the lineage of vernacular poetry. He honors Spenser, all the more so because Spenser had first taught English poets how to transfer the Virgilian genres to England and so to increase the honor of the line, revivified rather than interrupted by national ideals. There was schism in the Church, but there would be no schism in poetry. Spenser had more than imitated Virgil: He had *Englished* him by understanding how the idea of form merged with that of the historical vocation of art.

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Artists may always have had a bad conscience, have always felt themselves Colin Clouts; but Virgil gave his feelings direct expression at the end of the *Georgics* where he accused himself of practicing an art of "ignoble leisure" (*ignobile otium*) compared to the victorious military exploits of Caesar Octavianus. Make war, not poetry. Later commentators saw Virgil's poetry as a conscious progression from pastoral to georgic to epic, a movement which is thought to express a mounting sense of vocation. We go from sheep and the man, to tools and the man, to arms and the man: from the silly arts and the competitive songs of rural life to the more cultic, war-like tasks of agriculture, and finally to those martial and political qualities that extend the empire of civilization. The Virgilian progress was a commonplace in the Renaissance: One may refer to the stanzas introductory to the *Fairie Queene* in which Spenser promises to exchange his "oaten reedes" for "trumpets sterne," or to Marvell's ode on Cromwell which begins,

> The forward Youth that would appeare
> Must now forsake his Muses dear
> Nor in the Shadowes sing
> His numbers languishing.

Here Cromwell is a male debutant: To "appear" or to "come out"—the humanistic equivalent of epiphany—he must leave the pastoral sphere and exchange plow or harp for sword.

The debut of the Countess Dowager of Derby is somewhat belated (she is seventy years old, the span of human life according to the Bible), but then Milton himself is a belated poet, uncertain, despite the greatness of the poetical era just passing, whether there is true public recognition of the poet as a seeing mouth. Though *Arcades* still looks toward the epiphany of poetry, the courtly culture that could have recognized it is clearly at the term of its life. Seven years later, in *Lycidas*, Milton almost stages his own debut as a poet-prophet who sings independent of any class but his own, the class of all great poets. But he vacillates, returns to swainishness at the end, and does not "appear" in the Marvellian sense till after Cromwell and the Civil War, when he finally passes from pastoral to epic and to a more than national idea of poetry.

An Objection

Is not the theory presented here a throwback to nationalistic speculation? That is its danger, yet a lesser danger for us than to

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remain trapped in the rhetoric of an Esperanto history. Substantive thought about the racial or ideological components in a culture became especially suspect after the Nazis; the American ideal of assimilation then appeared the only pragmatic answer to ethnic stresses in a nation-state. Now that assimilation has proved to be not false, but certainly an imperfect reality, we are facing the agony of pluralism all over again: conflicts of allegiance, cultural transvestism, and a splintered national identity. Most criticism before the present era was a matter of defining the national genius rather than a particular work of art; and literary history established the native or foreign influences carried forward by an artist. Such determinations could be crassly nationalistic, but they acknowledged that the community was struggling for self-definition and that art played its role in that struggle. No one, of course, wishes to return to the nineteenth century racial calculus, even when practiced by so sensible a critic as Matthew Arnold:

> Science has now made visible to everybody the great and pregnant elements of difference which lie in race, and in how signal a manner they make the genius and history of an Indo-European people vary from those of a Semitic people. Hellenism is of Indo-European growth, Hebraism is of Semitic growth; and we English, a nation of Indo-European stock, seem to belong naturally to the movement of Hellenism. But nothing more strongly marks the essential unity of man than the affinities we can perceive, in this point or that, between members of one family of peoples and members of another; and no affinity of this kind is more strongly marked than that likeness in the strength and prominence of the moral fibre, which, notwithstanding immense elements of difference, knits in some special sort the genius and history of us English, and of our American descendants across the Atlantic, to the genius and history of the Hebrew people. . . .[26]

It may be needful, however, to take back into consciousness what was too quickly subsumed. "An era comes," said a French contemporary of Arnold's, the philosopher and mathematician Cournot, "which will see the value of ethnic characteristics increase relatively, though decrease in an absolute sense; and Europe seems now [circa 1860] to be entering that era." The *relative* increase in the importance of ethnic distinctions he laid to the very advance of civilization which levels or blunts purely social or historical distinctions and so raises the more ancient or indelible ones. Cournot's anxiety for the organic nurture of cultural forms—an anxiety first arising in the Romantic age—springs from the same insight concerning the advance of civilization. He

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fears that the expansion and availability of historical forms will burden emerging talents to the point of endangering their growth:

> If it is true that everything living, everything which bears the cachet of native beauty must emerge from a seed . . . how can we conceive of the birth and nurture of a truly original art, a truly innovative style, in an era where all genres, all styles are understood historically, explained, liked, and imitated. . . . When one preserves so well all the dead no place is left for the living. . . . The new type will not be able to sustain the competition with existing types already at a high degree of maturity and evolution. Art will therefore arrive by the very progress of historical criticism at a syncretistic and erudite stage . . . incompatible with conditions favoring its organic development.[27]

A return to Herder and the Romantic historians—or simply to E. R. Curtius[28]—may be painful. We have tended to forget such "unhappy, far-off things" as the birth-struggle of cosmopolitanism, and the foundation of the idea of world literature in the cultural effects of persecution, which made the Muse an emigré many times over. Without "racist" events like the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, which "drove the national genius abroad,"[29] we might never have had that cross-fertilization of talents that modernism takes for granted. In re-evaluating the prevalence of so many national, religious, or geopolitical ideals—superstitions we still live with despite the universalisms around us—the *genius loci* concept may help to prevent our collapsing national into nationalistic. It reminds us how flexible, if necessary, the idea of community is.

If art is the offspring of a precarious marriage between genius and *genius loci*, the place of which it is the genius is not necessarily a nation-state. Art can express a people (an emerging class or suppressed majority) or region (a Galilee whose genius becomes triumphant) or speech-community (as large as an Empire, as small as a professional body). Hence literary study often combats the premature universalism that urges the institution of a common tongue or perfect language. This ideal of a *charactéristique universelle* has haunted intellects from Leibnitz to Noam Chomsky. Turning skeptical and sensuous, it ends in the aggressive, ecumenical utopianism that makes the law go forth from the Zion of T-groups. But a pentacostal ideal of the plurality or mingling of tongues seems preferable to a one-dimensional, deracinated language. "Would to God that all the Lord's people were prophets," was Moses's reply to those who urged him to put down rival sayers. At the end of the eighteenth century, Rivarol claimed with elegant

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contempt that "Leibnitz was seeking a universal language, and we French were creating it all around him,"[30] but by the middle of the nineteenth—the great period of philological discovery—even a rationalist could defend the secularity of language against ideals of *une langue bien faite:*

> C'est . . . le langage, dans sa nature abstraite ou dans sa forme générale, que l'on doit considérer comme essentiellement défectueux, tandis que les langues parlées, formées lentement sous l'influence durables de besoins infiniment variés, ont, chacune à sa manière et d'après son degré de souplesse, paré à cet inconvénient radical. Selon le génie et les destinées des races, sous l'influence si diverse des zones et des climats, elles se sont appropriées plus spécialement à l'expression de tel ordre d'images, de passions et d'idées. . . . Ce qui aggrandirait et perfectionnerait nos facultés intellectuelles, en multipliant et en variant les moyens d'expression et de transmission de la pensée, ce serait, s'il était possible, de disposer à notre gré, et selon le besoin du moment, de toutes les langues parlées, et non de trouver construite cette langue systématique qui, dans la plupart des cas, serait le plus imparfait des instruments.[31]

Conclusion

"I believe in Eternity. I can find Greece, Asia, Italy, Spain and the Islands—the genius and the creative principle of each and of all eras, in my own mind." This confession of a comparatist is Emerson's. Only a century old, it already seems dated in its optimism and deceptively easy in its transcendence of nationality. Yet some such faith has always governed the study of literature when humanistic in its aim. Some such faith makes each national book a Book of the Nations. Studied this way, literature might do what Seneca attributed only to philosophy. It could open "not some local shrine, but the vast temple of all the gods, the universe itself."[32]

The one literary historian, however, who came closest to Emerson's sense of Eternity or Seneca's of Universality was strangely pessimistic about it. Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*, written in exile and published after World War II, foresaw the end of western history as we know it—of history as a rich, parti-colored succession of events, with personalities and writers dramatically divided by the pressure of class or conscience. Auerbach looked at this canvas of history, on which he saw consciousness strive with consciousness in the Hegelian manner, with something of Virgilian regret. Like Cournot, he surmised that we were moving toward a *nivellement* that would reduce the autochthonous element and

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gradually eliminate both local and national traditions; and for him this beginning to conformity augured the end of history. When one sees an airline ad with the motto "Introducing the Atlantic River" or hears André Malraux speak of technology creating an "Atlantic civilization," the forerunner of a world-wide humanistic culture, one is almost inclined to agree with Auerbach that historical time and space may be fading into the uniformity of landscapes seen from the air. But then one remembers the source of Auerbach's own strength as a historian of literature, how he traced the interaction of genius and *genius loci*, of Latin and the *lingua franca*, of the vernacular and the high style. Surely in that dubious cultural millenium, in that predicted mass-cult era, a Gloriana will appear once more to a Colin Clout, like another angel to another Caedmon, and say "Sing to me."

References

1. Wellek and Warren, *Theory of Literature* (New York, 1948), Chapter 19.

2. Krauss, *Studien und Aufsätze* (Berlin, 1959), pp. 19-72; Jauss, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft* (Konstanz, 1966); also Max Wehrli, "Sinn und Unsinn der Literaturgeschichte," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (February 26, 1967), Number 813, Blatt 5.

3. There are honorable exceptions. American Studies, strongly in touch with the idea of national character, has Howard Mumford Jones' *Theory of American Literature* (1948), the product of a cosmopolitan mind working in a national context. See also Charles Feidelson, *Symbolism and American Literature* (New Haven, 1953), antithetical yet complementary, the product of a cosmopolitan mind working in a specifically literary context. The call for an "inside history" was revived by Roy Harvey Pearce, *The Continuity of American Poetry* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey, 1961). Renato Poggioli engages the subject through Pareto's theory of history in *The Spirit of the Letter* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1965), and Claudio Guillén has recently remarked that "To explore the idea of literary history may very well be the main theoretical task that confronts the student of literature today."

4. Lucien Goldmann, *Le Dieu Caché* (Paris, 1955).

5. Eliot's dictum in *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (London, 1948), "civilization cannot simultaneously produce great folk poetry at one cultural level and *Paradise Lost* at another," is examined by Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society* (London, 1958), pp. 231-32. He points to the contemporaneity with *Paradise Lost* of *Pilgrim's Progress*.

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6. "Was sind die Bedingungen die einen Durchschlag aus den Unterbau der Gesellschaft erzwingen und damit das Verhältnis zum Überbau richtigstellen? In welcher Weise gehört überhaupt die Literatur zum Überbau der Gesellschaft?" Werner Krauss, *Perspektiven und Probleme* (Luchterhand Verlag: West Berlin, 1965), p. 19.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 372, translated freely. "Weltliteratur ist dann zu einem Pandämonium geworden, in dem sich Cervantes und Rabelais, Dante und Voltaire zunicken." The specific context is Krauss' attack on a concept of world literature as superliterature or metahistorical assemblage of masterpieces.

8. See, for example, P. J. Ballanche, *Essais de Palingénésie Sociale* (1827).

9. Cf. Malinowski, "The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages" in C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning* (London, 1923).

10. Sigurd Burkhardt, *Shakespearean Meanings* (Princeton, 1968).

11. Cf. Hans Blumenberg, *Die Legimität der Neuzeit* (Frankfurt am Main, 1966); William Collins, "Ode on the Poetical Character" (1747); Otto Rank, *Art and Artist* (New York, 1932), especially the chapter on "Creative Urge and Personality Development"; and Erik Erikson, *Young Man Luther* (New York, 1958).

12. A. Van Gennep, *Les Rites de Passage* (Paris, 1907; English translation, Chicago, 1961); Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Chicago, 1969); and Mallarmé, "Hamlet," *Crayonné au Théâtre* (1886).

13. Philip Aries, *Centuries of Childhood* (London, 1962), p. 11. Cf. the tendency of Elizabeth Sewell's *The Orphic Voice* (New Haven, 1960).

14. Cf. W. J. Bate, "The English Poet and the Burden of the Past, 1660-1820," in *Aspects of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. E. R. Wasserman (Baltimore, 1965); Harold Bloom, "Keats and the Embarrassments of Poetic Tradition" in *From Sensibility to Romanticism*, ed. H. Bloom and F. Hilles (New York, 1965); and G. H. Hartman, "Romanticism and Anti-Self-Consciousness," *Centennial Review* VI (1961), pp. 553-65.

15. Cf. H. Bloom, *op. cit.*, p. 517.

16. See Edgar Zilsel, *Die Entstehung des Geniebegriffes* (Tübingen, 1926); W. Lange-Eichbaum and Wolfram Kurth, *Genie, Irrsinn und Ruhm* (Sixth edition, Munich, 1967), chapter 1; and sources cited in note 1 to my "Romantic Poetry and the Genius Loci," in P. Demetz *et al.*, eds., *The Disciplines of Criticism* (New Haven, 1968).

17. "Romantic Poetry and the Genius Loci," *loc. cit.*; also my "Blake and the 'Progress of Poesy,'" in A. Rosenfeld, ed., *William Blake* (Providence, 1969).

18. "Natale comes qui temperat astrum" (Horace). The Genius-genial-genital link, common from Roman times in which Genius personified the male procreative power, apparently helped to establish, in the Renaissance, the

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connection between Genius and ingenium. (See, for example, Otto Rank, *Art and Artist,* chapter 2.) Zilsel, *op. cit.,* concludes that genius, in the modern sense of the term ("Sondergift der Natur," "Personifikation der Eigenart"), became prevalent toward the middle of the sixteenth century as the *learned* revival of astrological and demonological symbolism joined with a surviving *popular* belief in genii and guardian spirits. (But J. Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy,* describes astrology influencing the higher classes as early as the thirteenth century.) On the relation between "ingenium" and "vocatio," see Richard M. Douglas, "Talent and Vocation in Humanist and Protestant Thought," in T. K. Rabb and J. K. Seigel, eds., *Action and Conviction in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton, 1969).

19. Cf. H. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (new edition, Boston, 1966), p. 232. The modernist conflict between historical memory and "the temptation of immediacy" is scrupulously analyzed by Paul de Man in this issue of *Dædalus.*

20. Myth is expressive of Genius in Northrop Frye, but of the *genius loci* in Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* (1949). The difference, though significant, is not absolute and shows the need for a unified theory. Is the Old Man of Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence" a Genius or a *genius loci*? We have only the sparsest beginnings of a literary iconography on the subject of Genius. See, for example, C. S. Lewis, "Genius and Genius," in *Studies in Renaissance Literature* (New York, 1966), pp. 169-74. Also the analysis of the relation between sense of place and sense of self in my *Wordsworth's Poetry* (New Haven, 1964), especially pp. 211-19.

21. Michelet, *Histoire de France* X, p. 58.

22. Odell Shepard, ed., *The Journals of Bronson Alcott* (Boston, 1938), pp. 213-14.

23. M. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (M.I.T. Press: Cambridge, 1968), especially pp. 465ff. on the birth of modern literature "on the boundaries of two languages" (that is, Latin and the vernacular). Borges, from this perspective, is a modern Rabelais with a significantly different space-language relation. For remarks on the birth of a more contemporary literature, cf. Octavio Paz, "A Literature of Foundations," *Triquarterly* XII-XIV (1968-69), pp. 7-12.

24. Herder, "Von Ähnlichkeit der Mittlern Englischen und Deutschen Dichtkunst" (*Deutsches Museum,* 1777). Keats, Letter to J. H. Reynolds, February 3, 1818. The idea survives into the present: ". . . the English language—that was Shakespeare at the beginning of the seventeenth century—the English language grew up through the brains and the mouths of English people as such; I mean the nobility and the common people as well. But here, here in our country, the educated people and nobility spoke German, and just the people spoke Czech . . ." Jan Werich in A. Alvarez, *Under Pressure: The Writer in Society* (Pelican Books: 1965). These remarks differ vitally from an absolutist perspective of popular culture. ("Let

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us have pop art and *not* the old poets".) For a critique of the educational importance of popular culture, see G. H. Bantock, *Culture, Industrialization and Education* (Humanities Press: New York, 1968).

25. Cf. "The presupposition of *Weltliteratur* is a *felix culpa:* mankind's division into many cultures," Erich Auerbach, "Philologie und Weltliteratur" (1952), translated by M. and E. Said, *Centennial Review* XIII (1969), p. 2.

26. Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (London, 1869). Cf. E. Renan, *De la Part des Peuples Sémitiques dans l'Histoire de la Civilisation* (Paris, 1862).

27. A. Cournot, *Traité de l'Enchaînement des Idées Fondamentales dans les Sciences et dans l'Histoire* (Paris, 1861), Section 543, and *Considérations sur la Marche des Idées* (Paris, 1872), Book 5, Chapter 4.

28. "Es wäre eine wichtige Aufgabe der vergleichenden Literaturgeschichte, den Entwicklungsgang der einzelnen Literaturen und ihre Selbstinterpretationen herauszuarbeiten. Was ich das französische Literatursystem nannte, ist eine solche Selbstinterpretation und d.h. eine Ideologie, die bewusst gemacht werden kann. Die Literaturvergleichung würde, wenn sie die bezeichnete Aufgabe ergreift, einen wichtigen Beitrag zur Analyse der modernen Nationalideologien leisten. Diese sind nicht weniger bedeutsam und wirksam als die Klassenideologien." E. R. Curtius, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Romanischen Philologie* (Bern and Munich, 1960), pp. 20-21.

29. Joseph Texte, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Cosmopolitan Spirit in Literature,* tr. J. W. Matthews (London, 1899), p. xiii. Texte, one of our first scholarly comparatists, sees the cosmopolitan spirit founded not by an abstraction from nationality, but a convergence of the "Germanic" (northern) and "Latin" (southern) genius in Rousseau, who consolidated the eighteenth century influence of England on France.

30. Rivarol, *De l'Universalité de la Langue Française* (Berlin and Paris, 1784).

31. A. Cournot, *Essai sur les Fondements de la Connaissance et sur les Caractères de la Critique Philosophique* (Paris, 1851).

32. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Complete Works* (Boston, 1903-04), Vol. II, p. 9. Seneca, *Ep.* 90.28.

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PAUL DE MAN

Literary History and Literary Modernity

To WRITE reflectively about modernity leads to problems that put the usefulness of the term into question, especially as it applies, or fails to apply, to literature. There may well be an inherent contradiction between modernity, which is a way of acting and behaving, and such terms as "reflection" or "ideas" that play an important part in literature and history. The spontaneity of being modern conflicts with the claim to think and write about modernity; it is not at all certain that literature and modernity are in any way compatible concepts. Yet we all speak readily about modern literature and even use this term as a device for historical periodization, with the same apparent unawareness that history and modernity may well be even more incompatible than literature and modernity. The innocuous-sounding title of this paper may therefore contain no less than two logical absurdities—a most inauspicious beginning.

The term "modernity" reappears with increasing frequency and seems again to have become an issue not only as an ideological weapon, but as a theoretical problem as well. It may even be one of the ways by means of which the link between literary theory and literary praxis is being partly restored. At other moments in history, the topic "modernity" might be used just as an attempt at self-definition, as a way of diagnosing one's own present. This can happen during periods of considerable inventiveness, periods that seem, looking back, to have been unusually productive. At such actual or imaginary times, modernity would not be a value in itself, but would designate a set of values that exist independently of their modernity: Renaissance art is not admired because it may have been, at a certain moment, a distinctively "modern" form of art. We do not feel this way about the present, perhaps because such self-assurance can exist only retrospectively. It would be a hopeless task to try to

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define descriptively the elusive pattern of our own literary modernity; we draw nearer to the problem, however, by asking how modernity can, in itself, become an issue and why this issue seems to be raised with particular urgency with regard to literature or, even more specifically, with regard to theoretical speculations about literature.

That this is indeed the case can be easily verified in Europe as well as in the United States. It is particularly conspicuous, for example, in Germany where, after being banned for political reasons, the term modernity now receives a strong positive value-emphasis and has of late been much in evidence as a battle cry as well as a serious topic of investigation. The same is true in France and in the United States, perhaps most clearly in the renewed interest shown in the transfer of methods derived from the social sciences to literary studies.

Not so long ago, a concern with modernity would in all likelihood have coincided with a commitment to avant-garde movements such as dada, surrealism, or expressionism. The term would have appeared in manifestoes and proclamations, not in learned articles or international colloquia. But this does not mean that we can divide the twentieth century into two parts: a "creative" part that was actually modern, and a "reflective" or "critical" part that feeds on this modernity in the manner of a parasite, with active modernity replaced by theorizing about the modern. Certain forces that could legitimately be called modern and that were at work in lyric poetry, the novel, and the theater have also now become operative in the field of literary theory and criticism. The gap between the manifestoes and the learned articles has narrowed to the point where some manifestoes are quite learned and some articles—though by no means all—are quite provocative. This development has by itself complicated and changed the texture of our literary modernity a great deal and brought to the fore difficulties inherent in the term itself as soon as it is used historically or reflectively. It is perhaps somewhat disconcerting to learn that our usage of the word goes back to the late fifth century of our era and that there is nothing modern about the concept of modernity. It is even more disturbing to discover the host of complications that beset one as soon as a conceptual definition of the term is attempted, especially with regard to literature. One is soon forced to resort to paradoxical formulations, such as defining the modernity of a literary period as the manner in which it discovers the impossibility of being modern.

It is this complication I would like to explore with the help of

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some examples that are not necessarily taken from our immediate present. They should illuminate the problematic structure of a concept that, like all concepts that are in essence temporal, acquires a particularly rich complexity when it is made to refer to events that are in essence linguistic. I will be less concerned with a description of our own modernity than with the challenge to the methods or the possibility of literary history that the concept implies.

Among the various antonyms that come to mind as possible opposites for "modernity"—a variety which is itself symptomatic of the complexity of the term—none is more fruitful than "history." "Modern" can be used in opposition to "traditional" or even to "classical." For some French and American contemporaries, "modern" could even mean the opposite of "romantic," a usage that would be harder to conceive for some specialists of German literature. Antimodernists such as Emil Staiger do not hesitate to see the sources of a modernism they deplore in the Frühromantik of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, and the lively quarrel now taking place in Germany is still focused on the early nineteenth-century tensions between Weimar and Iena. But each of these antonyms—ancient, traditional, classical, and romantic—would embroil us in qualifications and discriminations that are, in fact, superficial matters of geographical and historical contingency. We will reach further if we try to think through the latent opposition between "modern" and "historical," and this will also bring us closest to the contemporary version of the problem.

The vested interest that academics have in the value of history makes it difficult to put the term seriously into question. Only an exceptionally talented and perhaps eccentric member of the profession could undertake this task with sufficient energy to make it effective, and even then it is likely to be accompanied by the violence that surrounds passion and rebellion. One of the most striking instances of such a rebellion occurred when Nietzsche, then a young philologist who had been treated quite generously by the academic establishment, turned violently against the traditional foundations of his own discipline in a polemical essay entitled "Of the Use and Misuse of History for Life" (*"Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben"*). The text is a good example of the complications that ensue when a genuine impulse toward modernity collides with the demands of a historical consciousness or of a culture based on the disciplines of history. It can serve as an

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introduction to the more delicate problems that arise when modernity is applied more specifically to literature.

It is not at once clear that Nietzsche is concerned with a conflict between modernity and history in his Second *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtung*. That history is being challenged in a fundamental way is obvious from the start, but it is not obvious that this happens in the name of modernity. The term "modern" most frequently appears in the text with negative connotations as descriptive of the way in which Nietzsche considers his contemporaries to be corrupted and enfeebled by an excessive interest in the past. As opposed to the Greeks, Nietzsche's "moderns" escape from the issues of the present, which they are too weak and sterile to confront, into the sheltering inwardness that history can provide, but that bears no relation to actual existence.[1] History and modernity seem to go hand in hand and jointly fall prey to Nietzsche's cultural criticism. Used in this sense, modernity is merely a descriptive term that designates a certain state of mind Nietzsche considers prevalent among the Germans of his time. A much more dynamic concept of modernity, far-reaching enough to serve as a first definition, appears in what is here directly being opposed to history, namely what Nietzsche calls "life."

"Life" is conceived not just in biological but in temporal terms as the ability to *forget* whatever precedes a present situation. Like most opponents of Rousseau in the nineteenth century, Nietzsche's thought follows purely Rousseauistic patterns; the text starts with a contrasting parallel between nature and culture that stems directly from the *Second Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*. The restlessness of human society, in contrast to the placid state of nature of the animal herd, is diagnosed as man's inability to forget the past.

> [Man] wonders about himself, about his inability [to learn] to forget, and about his tendency to remain tied to the past: No matter how far and how swiftly he runs, the chain runs with him . . . Man says "I remember," and envies the animal that forgets at once, and watches each moment die, disappear in night and mist, and disappear forever. Thus the animal lives unhistorically: It hides nothing and coincides at all moments exactly with that what it is; it is bound to be truthful at all times, unable to be anything else.[2]

This ability to forget and to live without historical awareness exists not only on an animal level. Since "life" has an ontological as well as a biological meaning, the condition of animality persists as a constitutive part of man. Not only are there moments when it

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governs his actions, but these are also the moments when he re-establishes contact with his spontaneity and allows his truly human nature to assert itself.

We saw that the animal, which is truly unhistorical and lives confined within a horizon almost without extension, exists in a relative state of happiness: We will therefore have to consider the ability to experience life in a nonhistorical way as the most important and most original of experiences, as the foundation on which right, health, greatness, and anything truly human can be erected.[3]

Moments of genuine humanity thus are moments at which all anteriority vanishes, annihilated by the power of an absolute forgetting. Although such a radical rejection of history may be illusory or unfair to the achievements of the past, it nevertheless remains justified as necessary to the fulfillment of our human destiny and as the condition for action.

As the man who acts must, according to Goethe, be without a conscience, he must also be without knowledge; he forgets everything in order to be able to *do* something; he is unfair toward what lies behind and knows only one right, the right of what is now coming into being as the result of his own action.[4]

We are touching here upon the radical impulse that stands behind all genuine modernity when it is not merely a descriptive synonym for the contemporaneous or for a passing fashion. Fashion (mode) can sometimes be only what remains of modernity after the impulse has subsided, as soon—and this can be almost at once—as it has changed from being an incandescent point in time into a reproducible cliché, all that remains of an invention that has lost the desire that produced it. Fashion is like the ashes left behind by the uniquely shaped flames of the fire, the trace alone revealing that a fire actually took place. But Nietzsche's ruthless forgetting, the blindness with which he throws himself into an action lightened of all previous experience, captures the authentic spirit of modernity. It is the tone of Rimbaud when he declares that he has no antecedents whatever in the history of France, that all one has to expect from poets is "*du nouveau*" and that one must be "absolutely modern"; it is the tone of Antonin Artaud when he asserts that "*la poésie écrite vaut une fois et ensuite qu'on la détruise. Que les poètes morts laissent la place aux autres . . . on doit en finir avec les chefs-d'oeuvres.*"[5] Modernity exists in the form of a desire to wipe out whatever came earlier in the hope of reaching at last a point that

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could be called a true present, a point of origin that marks a new departure. This combined interplay of a deliberate forgetting with an action that is also a new origin reaches the full power of the idea of modernity. Thus defined, modernity and history are diametrically opposed to each other in Nietzsche's text. Nor is there any doubt as to his commitment to modernity, the only way to reach the metahistorical realm in which the rhythm of one's existence coincides with that of the eternal return. Yet the shrill grandiloquence of the tone may make one suspect that the issue is not so simple as it may at first appear.

Of course, within the polemical circumstances in which it was written, the essay has to overstate the case against history and to aim beyond its target in the hope of reaching it. This tactic is less interesting, however, than the question of whether Nietzsche can free his own thought from historical prerogatives, whether his own text can approach the condition of modernity it advocates. From the start, the intoxication with the history-transcending life-process is counterbalanced by a deeply pessimistic wisdom that remains rooted in a sense of historical causality, although it reverses the movement of history from one of development to one of regression. Human "existence," we are told near the beginning of the essay, "is an uninterrupted pastness that lives from its own denial and destruction, from its own contradictions." (*"Das Dasein ist nur ein ununterbrochenes Gewesensein, ein Ding, das davon lebt, sich selbst zu verneinen und zu verzehren, sich selbst zu widersprechen."*[6]) This description of life as a constant regression has nothing to do with cultural errors, such as the excess of historical disciplines in contemporary education against which the essay polemicizes, but lies much deeper in the nature of things, beyond the reach of culture. It is a temporal experience of human mutability, historical in the deepest sense of the term in that it implies the necessary experience of any present as a *passing* experience that makes the past irrevocable and unforgettable because it is inseparable from any present or future. Keats gained access to the same awareness when, in *The Fall of Hyperion,* he contemplated in the fallen Saturn the past as a foreknowledge of his own mortal future:

> Without stay or prop
> But my own weak mortality, I bore
> The load of this eternal quietude,
> The unchanging gloom . . .

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Modernity invests its trust in the power of the present moment as an origin, but discovers that, in severing itself from the past, it has at the same time severed itself from the present. Nietzsche's text leads him irrevocably to this discovery, perhaps most strikingly (because most implicitly), when he comes close to describing his own function as a *critical* historian and discovers that the rejection of the past is not so much an act of forgetting as an act of critical judgment directed against himself.

> [The critical student of the past] must possess the strength, and must at times apply this strength, to the destruction and dissolution of the past in order to be able to live. He achieves this by calling this past into court, putting it under indictment, and finally condemning it; any past, however, deserves to be condemned, for such is the condition of human affairs that they are ruled by violence and weakness. . . . "It takes a great deal of strength to be able to live and forget to what extent life and injustice go together." . . . But this very life that has to forget must also at times be able to stop forgetting; then it will become clear how illegitimate the existence of something, of a privilege, a caste, or a dynasty actually is, and how much it deserves to be destroyed. Then the past is judged critically, attacked at its very roots with a sharp knife, and brutally cut down, regardless of established pieties. This is always a dangerous process, dangerous for life itself. Men and eras that serve life in this manner, by judging and destroying the past, are always dangerous and endangered. For we are inevitably the result of earlier generations and thus the result of their mistakes, their passions and aberrations, even of their crimes; it is not possible to loosen oneself entirely from this chain. . . . Afterwards, we try to give ourselves a new past from which we should have liked to descend instead of the past from which we actually descended. But this is also dangerous, because it is so difficult to trace the limit of one's denial of the past, and because the newly invented nature is likely to be weaker than the previous one. . . .[7]

The parricidal imagery of the passage, the weaker son condemning and killing the stronger father, reaches the inherent paradox of the denial of history implied in modernity.

As soon as modernism becomes conscious of its own strategies—and it cannot fail to do so if it is justified, as in this text, in the name of a concern for the future—it discovers itself to be a generative power that not only engenders history, but is part of a generative scheme that extends far back into the past. The image of the chain, to which Nietzsche instinctively resorts when he speaks of history, reveals this very clearly. Considered as a principle of life, modernity becomes a principle of origination and turns at once into a generative power that is itself historical. It becomes impossible to over-

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come history in the name of life or to forget the past in the name of modernity, because both are linked by a temporal chain that gives them a common destiny. Nietzsche finds it impossible to escape from history, and he finally has to bring the two incompatibles, history and modernity (now using the term in the full sense of a radical renewal), together in a paradox that cannot be resolved, an aporia that comes very close to describing the predicament of our own present modernity:

> For the impulse that stands behind our history-oriented education—in radical inner contradiction to the spirit of a "new time" or a "modern spirit"—must in turn be understood historically; history itself must resolve the problem of history, historical knowledge must turn its weapon against itself—this threefold "must" is the imperative of the "new times," if they are to achieve something truly new, powerful, life-giving, and original.[8]

Only through history is history conquered; modernity now appears as the horizon of a historical process that has to remain a gamble. Nietzsche sees no assurance that his own reflective and historical attempt achieves any genuine change; he realizes that his text itself can be nothing but another historical document,[9] and finally he has to delegate the power of renewal and modernity to a mythical entity called "youth" to which he can only recommend the effort of self-knowledge that has brought him to his own abdication.

The bad faith implied in advocating self-knowledge to a younger generation, while demanding from this generation that it act blindly, out of a self-forgetting that one is unwilling or unable to achieve oneself, forms a pattern all too familiar in our own experience to need comment. In this way Nietzsche, at this early point in his career, copes with a paradox that his thought has revealed with impressive clarity: Modernity and history relate to each other in a curiously contradictory way that goes beyond antithesis or opposition. If history is not to become sheer regression or paralysis, it depends on modernity for its duration and renewal; but modernity cannot assert itself without being at once swallowed up and reintegrated into a regressive historical process. Nietzsche offers no real escape out of a predicament in which we readily recognize the mood of our own modernity. Modernity and history seem condemned to being linked together in a self-destroying union that threatens the survival of both.

If we see in this paradoxical condition a diagnosis of our own

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modernity, then literature has always been essentially modern. Nietzsche was speaking of life and of culture in general, of modernity and history as they appear in all human enterprises in the most general sense possible. The problem becomes more intricate when it is restricted to literature. Here we are dealing with an activity that necessarily contains, within its own specificity, the very contradiction that Nietzsche discovered at the endpoint of his rebellion against a historically minded culture. Regardless of historical or cultural conditions, beyond the reach of educational or moral imperatives, the modernity of literature confronts us at all times with an unsolvable paradox. On the one hand, literature has a constitutive affinity with action, with the unmediated, free act that knows no past; some of the impatience of Rimbaud or Artaud echoes in all literary texts, no matter how serene and detached they may seem. The historian, in his function as historian, can remain quite remote from the collective acts he records; his language and the events that the language denotes are clearly distinct entities. But the writer's language is to some degree the product of his own action; he is both the historian and the agent of his own language. The ambivalence of writing is such that it can be considered both an act and an interpretative process that follows after an act with which it cannot coincide. As such, it both affirms and denies its own nature or specificity. Unlike the historian, the writer remains so closely involved with action that he can never free himself of the temptation to destroy whatever stands between him and his deed, especially the temporal distance that makes him dependent on an earlier past. The appeal of modernity haunts all literature. It is revealed in numberless images and emblems that appear at all periods—in the obsession with a *tabula rasa,* with new beginnings—that finds recurrent expression in all forms of writing. No true account of literary language can bypass this persistent temptation of literature to fulfill itself in a single moment. The temptation of immediacy is constitutive of a literary consciousness and has to be included in a definition of the specificity of literature.

The manner in which this specificity asserts itself, however, the form of its actual manifestation, is curiously oblique and confusing. Often in the course of literary history writers openly assert their commitment to modernity thus conceived. Yet whenever this happens, a curious logic that seems almost uncontrolled, a necessity inherent in the nature of the problem rather than in the will of the writer, directs their utterance away from their avowed

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purpose. Assertions of literary modernity often end up by putting the possibility of being modern seriously into question. But precisely because this discovery goes against an original commitment that cannot simply be dismissed as erroneous, it never gets stated outright, but hides instead behind rhetorical devices of language that disguise and distort what the writer is actually saying, perhaps in contrast to what he meant to say. Hence the need for the interpreter of such texts to respond to levels of meaning not immediately obvious. The very presence of such complexities indicates the existence of a special problem: How is it that a specific and important feature of a literary consciousness, its desire for modernity, seems to lead outside literature into something that no longer shares this specificity, thus forcing the writer to undermine his own assertions in order to remain faithful to his vocation?

It is time to clarify what we are trying to convey with some examples taken from texts that openly plead the cause of modernity. Many, but by no means all, of these texts are written by people who stand outside literature from the start, either because they instinctively tend toward the interpretative distance of the historian, or because they incline toward a form of action no longer linked to language. During the quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns, the debate between a traditional conception of literature and modernity that took place in France near the end of the seventeenth century and that is still considered by some[10] as the starting point of a "modern" sense of history, it is striking that the modern camp not only contained men of slighter literary talent, but that their arguments against classical literature were often simply against literature as such. The nature of the debate forced the participants to make comparative critical evaluations of ancient versus contemporary writing; it obliged them to offer something resembling readings of passages in Homer, Pindar, or Theocritus. Although no one covered himself with critical glory in the performance of this task—mainly because the powerful imperative of decorum (*bienséance*) tends to become a particularly opaque screen that stands between the antique text and the classical reading[11]—the partisans of the Ancients still performed a great deal better than the pro-moderns. If one compares the remarks of a "moderne" such as Charles Perrault on Homer or his application in 1688 of seventeenth-century *bienséance* to Hellenic texts in *Paralléle des anciens et des modernes* with Boileau's reply in *Réflexions critiques sur quelques passages du rhéteur Longin of* 1964,[12] it

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then becomes clear that the "*anciens*" had a notion of decorum that remained in much closer contact with literature, including its constitutive impulse toward literary modernity, than did the "modernes." This fact undoubtedly strengthens, in the long run, the cause of the moderns, despite their own critical shortcomings, but the point is precisely that a partisan and deliberately pro-modern stance is much more easily taken by someone devoid of literary sensitivity than by a genuine writer. Literature, which is inconceivable without a passion for modernity, also seems to oppose from the inside a subtle resistance to this passion.

Thus we find in the same period a detached and ironical mind like that of the early Fontenelle openly taking the side of the moderns in asserting that "nothing stands so firmly in the way of progress, nothing restricts the mind so effectively as an excessive admiration for the Ancients."[13] Having to demystify the merit of invention and origin on which the superiority of the Ancients is founded—and which, in fact, roots their merit in their genuine modernity—Fontenelle himself becomes entertainingly inventive in his assertion that the prestige of so-called origins is merely an illusion created by the distance separating us from a remote past. At the same time he expresses the mock-anxious fear that our own progressing rationality will prevent us from benefiting, in the eyes of future generations, from the favorable prejudice we were silly enough to bestow on the Greeks and the Romans.

En vertu de ces compensations, nous pouvons espérer qu'on nous admirera avec excès dans les siècles à venir, pour nous payer du peu de cas que l'on fait aujourd'hui de nous dans le nôtre. On s'évertuera à trouver dans nos ouvrages des beautés que nous n'avons point prétendu y mettre; telle faute incontestable et dont l'auteur conviendrait lui-même aujourd'hui trouvera des défenseurs d'un courage invincible; et Dieu sait avec quel mépris on traitera en comparaison de nous, les beaux esprits de ces temps-là, qui pourront bien être des américains. C'est ainsi que le même préjugé nous abaisse dans un temps, pour nous élever dans un autre, c'est ainsi qu'on en est la victime et puis la divinité; jeu assez plaisant à considérer avec des yeux indifférents.

The same playful indifference prompts Fontenelle to add the remark:

Mais il y a toutes les apparences du monde que la raison se perfectionnera, et que l'on se désabusera généralement du préjugé grossier de l'Antiquité. Peut-être ne durera-t-il pas encore longtemps! peut-être à l'heure qu'il est admirons-nous les Anciens en pure perte, et sans devoir jamais être admiré en cette qualité-là. Ce serait un peu fâcheux.[14]

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Fontenelle's historical irony is far from being unliterary, but if taken at face value it stands at the very opposite pole of the impulse toward action without which literature would not be what it is. Nietzsche admired Fontenelle, but it must have been as an apollinian anti-self, for nothing is more remote from the spirit of modernity than Fontenelle's *perfectibilité,* a kind of statistical, quantitative balance between right and wrong, a process of trial-by-chance that may perhaps lead to certain rules by means of which aberrations could be prevented in the future. In the name of *perfectibilité,* he can reduce critical norms to a set of mechanical rules and assert, with only a trace of irony, that literature progressed faster than science because the imagination obeys a smaller number of easier rules than does reason. He can easily dismiss poetry and the arts as "unimportant," since he pretends to have moved so far away from their concerns. His stance is that of the objective, scientific historian. Even if taken seriously, this stance would engage him in a task of interpretation closer to literature than that of Charles Perrault, for example, who has to resort to the military and imperial achievements of his age to find instances of the superiority of the moderns. That such a type of modernism leads outside literature is clear enough. The topos of the anti-literary, technological man as an incarnation of modernity is recurrent among the *idées reçues* of the nineteenth century and symptomatic of the alacrity with which modernity welcomes the opportunity to abandon literature altogether. The opposite temptation toward a purely detached interpretation, of which we find an ironic version in Fontenelle, also reveals the inherent trend to draw away from the literary. Perrault's committed, as well as Fontenelle's detached, modernism both lead away from literary understanding.

Our examples may have been one-sided, however, since we were dealing with nonliterary figures. More revealing is the case of writers whose proximity to literature is beyond dispute and who find themselves, in true accordance with their literary vocation, defenders of modernity—not just in the choice of their themes and settings, but as representative of a fundamental attitude of mind. The poetry of Baudelaire, as well as his plea for modernity in several critical texts, would be a good case in point.

As seen in the famous essay on Constantin Guys, "Le peintre de la vie moderne," Baudelaire's conception of modernity is very close to that of Nietzsche in his second *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtung.*

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It stems from an acute sense of the present as a constitutive element of all esthetic experience:

Le plaisir que nous retirons de la représentation du présent tient non seulement à la beaute dont il peut être revêtu, mais aussi à sa qualité essentielle de présent.[15]

The paradox of the problem is potentially contained in the formula *"représentation du présent,"* which combines a repetitive with an instantaneous pattern without apparent awareness of the incompatibility. Yet this latent tension governs the development of the entire essay. Baudelaire remains faithful throughout to the seduction of the present; any temporal awareness is so closely tied for him to the present moment that memory comes to apply more naturally to the present than it does to the past:

Malheur à celui qui étudie dans l'antique autre chose que l'art pur, la logique, la méthode générale ! Pour s'y trop plonger, il perd *la mémoire du présent;* il abdique la valeur et les privilèges fournis par la circonstance; car presque toute notre originalité vient de l'estampille que le *temps* imprime à nos sensations.[16]

The same temporal ambivalence prompts Baudelaire to couple any evocation of the present with terms such as *"représentation," "mémoire,"* or even *"temps,"* all opening perspectives of distance and difference within the apparent uniqueness of the instant. Yet his modernity too, like Nietzsche's, is a forgetting or a suppression of anteriority: The human figures that epitomize modernity are defined by experiences such as childhood or convalescence, a freshness of perception that results from a slate wiped clear, from the absence of a past that has not yet had time to tarnish the immediacy of perception (although what is thus freshly discovered prefigures the end of this very freshness), of a past that, in the case of convalescence, is so threatening that it has to be forgotten.

All these experiences of immediacy coupled with their implicit negation, strive to combine the openness and freedom of a present severed from all other temporal dimensions, the weight of the past as well as the concern with a future, with a sense of totality and completeness that could not be achieved if a more extended awareness of time were not also involved. Thus we find Constantin Guys, who is made to serve as a kind of emblem for the poetic mind, to be a curious synthesis of a man of action (that is, a man of the moment, severed from past and future) with an observer and recorder of moments that are necessarily combined within a larger

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totality. Like the photographer or reporter of today, he has to be present at the battles and the murders of the world, not to inform, but to freeze what is most transient and ephemeral into a recorded image. Constantin Guys, before being an artist, has to be *homme du monde,* driven by curiosity and "always, spiritually, in the state of mind of the convalescent." The description of his technique offers perhaps the best formulation of this ideal combination of the instantaneous with a completed whole, of pure fluid movement with form—a combination that would achieve a reconciliation between the impulse toward modernity and the demand of the work of art to achieve duration. The painting remains steadily in motion and exists in the open, improvised manner of a sketch that is like a constant new beginning. The final closing of the form, constantly postponed, occurs so swiftly and suddenly that it hides its dependence on previous moments in its own precipitous instantaneity: The entire process tries to outrun time, to achieve a swiftness that would transcend the latent opposition between action and form.

Ainsi, dans l'exécution de M. G. se montrent deux choses: l'une, une contention de mémoire résurrectioniste, évocatrice, une mémoire qui dit à chaque chose: "Lazare, lève-toi!"; l'autre, un feu, une ivresse de crayon, de pinceau, ressemblant presque à une fureur. C'est la peur de n'aller pas assez vite, de laisser échapper le fantôme avant que la synthèse n'en soit extraite et saisie . . . M. G. commence par de légères indications au crayon, qui ne marquent guère que la place que les objets doivent tenir dans l'espace. Les plans principaux sont indiqués ensuite . . . Au dernier moment, le contour des objets est définitivement cerné par de l'encre . . . Cette méthode si simple et presque élémentaire . . . a cet incomparable avantage qu'à n'importe quel point de son progrès, chaque dessin a l'air suffisamment fini; vous nommerez cela une ébauche si vous voulez, mais ébauche parfaite.[17]

That Baudelaire has to refer to this synthesis as a "*fantôme*" is another instance of the rigor that forces him to double any assertion by a qualifying use of language that puts it at once into question. The Constantin Guys of the essay is himself a phantom, bearing some resemblance to the actual painter, but differing from him in being the fictional achievement of what existed only potentially in the "real" man. Even if we consider the character in the essay to be a mediator used to formulate the prospective vision of Baudelaire's own work, we can still witness in this vision a similar disincarnation and reduction of meaning. At first, in the enumeration of the themes that the painter (or writer) will select, we again find the temptation of modernity to move outside art, its nostalgia

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for the immediacy, the facticity of entities that are in contact with the present and illustrate the heroic ability to ignore or to forget that this present contains the prospective self-knowledge of its end. The figure chosen can be more or less close to being aware of this: It can be the mere surface, the outer garment of the present, the unwitting defiance of death in the soldier's colorful coat, or it can be the philosophically conscious sense of time of the dandy. In each case, however, the "subject" Baudelaire chose for a theme is preferred because it exists in the facticity, in the modernity, of a present that is ruled by experiences that lie outside language and escape from the successive temporality, the duration involved in writing. Baudelaire states clearly that the attraction of a writer toward his theme—which is also the attraction toward an action, a modernity, and an autonomous *meaning* that would exist outside the realm of language—is primarily an attraction to what is not art. The statement occurs with reference to the most anonymous and shapeless "theme" of all, that of the crowd: *"C'est un moi insatiable de non-moi. . . ."*[18] If one remembers that this *"moi"* designates, in the metaphor of a subject, the specificity of literature, then this specificity is defined by its inability to remain constant to its own specificity.

This, at least, corresponds to the first moment of a certain mode of being, called literature. It soon appears that literature is an entity that exists not as a single moment of self-denial, but as a plurality of moments that can, if one wishes, be represented—but this is a mere representation—as a succession of moments or a duration. In other words, literature can be represented as a movement and is, in essence, the fictional narration of this movement. After the initial moment of flight away from its own specificity, a moment of return follows that leads literature back to what it is—but we must bear in mind that terms such as "after" and "follows" do not designate actual moments in a diachrony, but are used purely as *metaphors* of duration. Baudelaire's text illustrates this return, this *reprise,* with striking clarity. The *"moi insatiable de non-moi . . ."* has been moving toward a series of "themes" that reveal the impatience with which it tries to move away from its own center. These themes become less and less concrete and substantial, however, although they are being evoked with increasing realism and mimetic rigor in the description of their surfaces. The more realistic and pictorial they become, the more abstract they are, the slighter the residue of meaning that would exist outside their specificity as

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mere language and mere *significant*. The last theme that Baudelaire evokes, that of the carriages, has nothing whatever to do with the facticity of the carriage—although Baudelaire insists that in the paintings by Constantin Guys "*toute [la] carrosserie est parfaitement orthodoxe; chaque partie est à sa place et rien n'est à reprendre.*"[19] The substantial, thematic *meaning* of the carriage as such, however, has disappeared:

> Dans quelque attitude qu'elle soit jetée, avec quelque allure qu'elle soit lancée, une voiture, comme un vaisseau, emprunte au mouvement une grâce mystérieuse et complexe très difficile à sténographier. Le plaisir que l'oeil de l'artiste en reçoit est tiré, ce semble, de la série de figures géométriques que cet objet, déjà si compliqué, engendre successivement et rapidement dans l'espace.[20]

What is here being stenographed is the movement by which, in apparent and metaphorical succession, literature first moves away from itself and then returns. All that remains of the theme is a mere outline, less than a sketch, a time-arabesque rather than a figure. The carriage has been allegorized into nothingness and exists as the purely temporal vibration of a successive movement that has only linguistic existence—for nothing is more radically metaphorical than the expression "*figures géométriques*" that Baudelaire is compelled to use to make himself understood. But that he wants to be understood, and not misunderstood in the belief that this geometry would have recourse to anything that is not language, is clear from its implied identification with a mode of writing. The *stenos* in the word stenography, meaning narrow, could be used to designate the confinement of literature within its own boundaries, its dependence on duration and repetition that Baudelaire experienced as a curse. But the fact that the word designates a form of writing indicates the compulsion to return to a literary mode of being, as a form of language that knows itself to be mere repetition, mere fiction and allegory, forever unable to participate in the spontaneity of action or modernity.

The movement of this text—that could be shown to parallel the development of Baudelaire's poetry as it moves from the sensory richness of the earlier poems to their gradual allegorization in the prose versions of the *Spleen de Paris*—recurs with various degrees of explicitness in all writers and measures the legitimacy of their claim to be called writers. Modernity turns out to be indeed one of the concepts by means of which the distinctive nature of literature can be revealed in all its intricacy. No wonder it had to become

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a central issue in critical discussions and a source of torment to writers who have to confront it as a challenge to their vocation. They can neither accept nor reject it with good conscience. When they assert their own modernity, they are bound to discover their dependence on similar assertions made by their literary predecessors; their claim to being a new beginning turns out to be the repetition of a claim that has always already been made. As soon as Baudelaire has to replace the single instant of invention, conceived as an act, by a successive movement that involves at least two distinct moments, he enters into a world that assumes the depths and complications of an articulated time, an interdependence between past and future that prevents any present from ever coming into being.

The more radical the rejection of anything that came before, the greater the dependence on the past. Antonin Artaud can go to the extreme of rejecting all forms of theatrical art prior to his own; in his own work, he can demand the destruction of any form of written text—he nevertheless finally has to ground his own vision in examples such as the Balinese theater, the least modern, the most text-frozen type of theater conceivable. And he has to do so with full knowledge that he thus destroys his own project, with the hatred of the traitor for the camp that he has chosen to join. Quoting the lines in which Artaud attacks the very concept of the theater on which he has waged his entire undertaking (*"Rien de plus impie que le système des Balinais . . ."*), Jacques Derrida can rightly comment: "[Artaud] was unable to resign himself to a theater based on repetition, unable to renounce a theater that would do away with all forms of repetition."[21] The same fatal interplay governs the writer's attitude toward modernity: he cannot renounce the claim to being modern but also cannot resign himself to his dependence on predecessors—who, for that matter, were caught in the same situation. Never is Baudelaire so close to his predecessor Rousseau as in the extreme modernity of his latest prose poems, and never is Rousseau so tied to his literary ancestors as when he pretends to have nothing more to do with literature.

The distinctive character of literature thus becomes manifest as an inability to escape from a condition that is felt to be unbearable. It seems that there can be no end, no respite in the ceaseless pressure of this contradiction, at least as long as we consider it from the point of view of the writer as subject. The discovery of his inability to be modern leads him back to the fold,

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within the autonomous domain of literature, but never with genuine appeasement. As soon as he can feel appeased in this situation he ceases to be a writer. His language may be capable of a certain degree of tranquillity; it is, after all, the product of a renunciation that has allowed for the metaphorical thematization of the predicament. But this renunciation does not involve the subject. The continuous appeal of modernity, the desire to break out of literature toward the reality of the moment, prevails and, in its turn, folding back upon itself, engenders the repetition and the continuation of literature. Thus modernity, which is fundamentally a falling away from literature and a rejection of history, also acts as the principle that gives literature duration and historical existence.

The manner in which this inherent conflict determines the structure of literary language cannot be treated within the limits of this paper. We are more concerned, at this point, with the question of whether a history of an entity as self-contradictory as literature is conceivable. In the present state of literary studies this possibility is far from being clearly established. It is generally admitted that a positivistic history of literature, treating it as if it were a collection of empirical data, can only be a history of what literature is not. At best, it would be a preliminary classification opening the way for actual literary study and, at worst, an obstacle in the way of literary understanding. On the other hand, the intrinsic interpretation of literature claims to be anti- or a-historical, but often presupposes a notion of history of which the critic is not himself aware.

In describing literature, from the standpoint of the concept of modernity, as the steady fluctuation of an entity away from and toward its own mode of being, we have constantly stressed that this movement does not take place as an actual sequence in time; to represent it as such is merely a metaphor making a sequence out of what occurs in fact as a synchronic juxtaposition. The sequential, diachronic structure of the process stems from the nature of literary language as an entity, not as an event. Things do not happen as if a literary text (or a literary vocation) moved for a certain period of time away from its center, then turned around, folding back upon itself at one specific moment to travel back to its genuine point of origin. These imaginary motions between fictional points cannot be located, dated, and represented as if they were places in a geography or events in a genetic history. Even in the discursive texts we have used—in Baudelaire, in Nietzsche, or even

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in Fontenelle—the three moments of flight, return, and the turning point at which flight changes into return or vice-versa exist simultaneously on levels of meaning that are so intimately intertwined that they cannot be separated. When Baudelaire, for example, speaks of *"représentation du présent,"* of *"mémoire du présent,"* of *"synthèse du fantôme,"* or of *"ébauche finie,"* his language names, at the same time, the flight, the turning point, and the return. Our entire argument lies compressed in such formulations. This would even be more obvious if we had used poetic instead of discursive texts. It follows that it would be a mistake to think of literary history as the diachronic narrative of the fluctuating motion we have tried to describe. Such a narrative can be only metaphorical, and history is not fiction.

With respect to its own specificity (that is, as an existing entity susceptible to historical description), literature exists at the same time in the modes of error and truth; it both betrays and obeys its own mode of being. A positivistic history that sees literature only as what it is not (as an objective fact, an empirical psyche, or a communication that transcends the literary text as text) is, therefore, necessarily inadequate. The same is true of approaches to literature that take for granted the specificity of literature—what the French structuralists, echoing the Russian formalists, call literarity (*littérarité*) of literature. If literature rested at ease within its own self-definition, it could be studied according to methods that are scientific rather than historical. We are obliged to confine ourselves to history when this is no longer the case, when the entity steadily puts its own ontological status into question. The structuralist goal of a science of literary forms assumes this stability and treats literature as if the fluctuating movement of aborted self-definition were not a constitutive part of its language. Structuralist formalism, therefore, systematically bypasses the necessary component of literature for which the term "modernity" is not such a bad name after all, despite its ideological and polemical overtones. It is a very revealing paradox, confirming again that anything touching upon literature becomes at once a Pandora's box, that the critical method which denies literary modernity would appear—and even, in certain respects, would be—the most modern of critical movements.

Could we conceive of a literary history that would not truncate literature by putting us misleadingly *into* or *outside* it, that would be able to maintain the literary aporia throughout, account at the

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same time for the truth and the falsehood of the knowledge literature conveys about itself, distinguish rigorously between metaphorical and historical language, and account for literary modernity as well as for its historicity? Clearly, such a conception would imply a revision of the notion of history and, beyond that, of the notion of time on which our idea of history is based. It would imply, for instance, abandoning the pre-assumed concept of history as a generative process that we found operative in Nietzsche's text—although this text also began to rebel against it—of history as a temporal hierarchy that resembles a parental structure in which the past is like an ancestor begetting, in a moment of unmediated presence, a future capable of repeating in its turn the same generative process. The relationship between truth and error that prevails in literature cannot be represented genetically, since truth and error exist simultaneously, thus preventing the favoring of the one over the other. The need to revise the foundations of literary history may seem like a desperately vast undertaking; the task appears even more disquieting if we contend that literary history could in fact be paradigmatic for history in general, since man himself, like literature, can be defined as an entity capable of putting his own mode of being into question. The task may well be less sizable, however, than it seems at first. All the directives we have formulated as guidelines for a literary history are more or less taken for granted when we are engaged in the much more humble task of reading and understanding a literary text. To become good literary historians, we must remember that what we usually call literary history has little or nothing to do with literature and that what we call literary interpretation—provided only it is good interpretation—is in fact literary history. If we extend this notion beyond literature, it merely confirms that the bases for historical knowledge are not empirical facts but written texts, even if these texts masquerade in the guise of wars or evolutions.

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10. See, for example, Werner Krauss, "Cartaud de la Villate und die Entstehung des geschichtlichen Weltbildes in der Frühaufkläfung," *Studien zur Deutschen und Französischen Aufklärung* (Berlin, 1963), and H. R. Jauss' substantial introduction to his facsimile edition of Charles Perrault, *Parallèle des anciens et des modernes* (W. Fink: Munich, 1964), pp. 12-13.

11. Critical utterances concerning the Homeric question are particularly revealing in this respect, in a partisan of the Moderns like Charles Perrault as well as in a partisan of the Ancients like Boileau.

12. H. R. Jauss, *op. cit.,* mentions as other convincing instances of critical insight among the defenders of the Ancients la Bruyère's *Discours sur Théophraste* (1699) and Saint-Evremont's *Sur les poèmes des anciens* (1685).

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15. Charles Baudelaire, "Guys, le peintre de la vie moderne" in F. F. Gautier, ed., *l'Art romantique, Oeuvres complètes IV* (Paris, 1923), p. 208.

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J. HILLIS MILLER

Williams' *Spring and All* and the Progress of Poetry

TO DISCUSS progress in the humanities is like picking up the loose end of a tangled ball of yarn: The first thread leads immediately to another with which it is inextricably entwined. In no time there comes to hand a host of themes in a crisscross of lines involving fundamental questions about the arts, interpretation, and history. In my discussion of these, for the most part I shall use literature and literary criticism, which, for my purposes, may conveniently stand by synecdoche for all the humanities.

Progress in the humanities, one instinctively assumes, must have occurred, as there has been progress in the other areas of culture, most spectacularly in science. The nearly commensurate effort in the humanities—all the books, editions, scholarly journals, research grants, institutes, and symposia—must have accomplished something. This raises immediately the question of what might be meant by progress in the humanities. Presumably the humanities are not the arts themselves but the study of them, the establishment of texts and facts and the interpretation of the monuments of the past and the present. Even so, it is impossible to make the same distinction between humanistic study and its subject-matter that can be made more or less unequivocally between nature and the sciences investigating it. The arts and their interpretation have been inextricably connected throughout history. This symbiosis has meant that important "advances" in techniques of interpretation have usually coincided with periods of notable flowering in the arts, as in the case of Aristotle and Greek tragedy, Romantic criticism and Romantic literature, or the criticism and art of our own day. Moreover, the same people or those in closely related fields have often been responsible for "progress" both in the arts and in their interpretation—for example, Coleridge, Matthew Arnold, Baudelaire,

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Henry James, T. S. Eliot, and Russian formalists in association with Futurists. In spite of Darwin, it obviously would not make sense to speak of a progress in nature accompanying the striking progress in scientific methodology accomplished during the last four centuries. Progress in the humanistic studies, on the other hand, cannot be dissociated from progress in the arts themselves.

If this is so, the problem of a definition of progress in humanistic studies cannot be separated from a similar problem in the arts themselves. How would we recognize an example of such progress? By what yardstick or according to what scale would we measure it? What fixed external point of reference could we use? Does progress in the arts increase power to imitate what is already known to be there as the real and the true; or to bring into the open what is already there but has been hidden; or to create only out of signs ever more subtle and complex forms, imposed on chaos to order it and make it habitable? *Mimesis, aletheia,* independent creation—these three theories of art in their conflict and interdependence have dominated Western thought since before Plato. To each corresponds a different set of theories of interpretation, that is, theories of the humanistic studies. The conscious or unconscious assumption that one of the three is exclusively valid tends to determine not only procedures of interpretation, but also criteria by which progress in the humanities might be identified and measured.

Two contradictory notions about progress in the arts and the corresponding progress in interpretation have governed the habitual thought of Western man. On the one hand, there is an almost irresistible tendency to think of literary history and the history of the arts as a progressive refinement in sophistication and subtlety. The "history of the English novel," for example, is often thought to begin with the rude forms of the late sixteenth century, develop complex narrative techniques in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and culminate in the refinement of James, Conrad, Joyce, and Woolf. Henry James is seen as more "complex," more "advanced," and more "profound" than Jane Austen. This progress in the novel, it is assumed, has accompanied a commensurate improvement in the tools available for interpreting fiction, James's own celebrated prefaces being among the most powerful.

There are many versions of this paradigm of progress. Scientists, for the most part, do not need a library with all the technical books and papers going back to the origins of modern science. They require only the journals of the last five years or so and would be

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willing to have the earlier scientific material stored, buried, or perhaps even burnt. There is a continual self-destruction involved in scientific progress; progress in the humanities is sometimes considered analogous. Each new generation of scholars, it seems, has more facts, better texts, and more powerful tools of interpretation than the last. Earlier editions and critical interpretations are continually being rendered obsolete. Of what use are nineteenth-century texts of Shakespeare or of other Renaissance writers, now that the science of textual criticism has advanced to such a peak of perfection? Each scholar is only one of a long line of tillers of the soil; he justifies himself by destroying the scholars who preceded him. The publication of his findings is suicidal in the sense that he is offering himself up to be destroyed in his turn by the next scholar. As Arthur Rimbaud, that great explorer of the myths of progress, puts it, "[T]here will come other horrible workers: they will begin at the horizons where he has succumbed."[1]

This picture of progress in the humanities is related to the beguiling dream of a final, perfect, full interpretation of a given text. The day will come when the last word will have been said about *Hamlet*, the "Ode to a Nightingale," or *Bleak House*. Some great critic will write a definitive critical essay, and then nothing more will remain to be said about *Paradise Lost*. Sometimes, as a nightmare sprung from his "professional deformation," the scholar may be seized by a vision of the gradual self-destruction of his enterprise. As one by one all the texts are exhausted and definitive editions and interpretations are established, his reason for existing will fade and ultimately vanish. The teacher of the humanities seems destined to be replaced by the tape-recorder—thousands of classrooms simultaneously playing the same superlative lecture on *Hamlet*, perhaps to a lecture hall empty of all save recorders taking down the absent professor's lecture on behalf of the absent students, all of whom are presumably busy somewhere else. It is only a step from this to another fantasy, also not my invention. This is the dream of a periodical destruction of all the texts, critical books, and scholarly journals, perhaps a destruction, too, of the scholars with their elephantine memories; then the job of interpretation could start in happy ignorance again from the beginning. Once more all the interesting projects would remain to be done—anything to prevent the humanistic scholars from becoming victims of their own success, sufferers from a new kind of technological unemployment. This fantasy has its parallel in the arts, for example, in an idea important to Ezra Pound

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and T. S. Eliot. Since all literature of Western Europe forms a whole, once a certain thing has been done in language—*La divina commedia, Madame Bovary,* or whatever—it never has to be done again. In fact, it cannot be repeated, so that poets by their accomplishments are gradually putting themselves out of business.

Alongside this *idée reçue* of progress in the humanities, with its many versions, shadings, and comical extravagances, goes a diametrically opposed notion, a notion no less widespread and no less (for the most part) an unexamined prejudice. This is the idea that the progress of civilization is incompatible with the progress of poetry. The more refined our culture becomes, the more difficult it is to write authentic poetry. In a perfected civilization poetry would disappear. Poetry is destroyed by the self-consciousness, the consciousness of the past, the distance from nature, and the loss of natural spontaneity characteristic of man in a highly cultivated state of society. The first poems and paintings were the best. Since those primitive geniuses produced their masterpieces, the history of the arts has been one of progressive degeneration and thinning out. This conception is related in a subtle way to that myth of modernity which Paul de Man has discussed so perceptively in his paper for this issue of *Dædalus.* Authenticity in poetry lies in unselfconscious spontaneity. True poetry must have no history; it must rise immediately from the moment of perception. The increasing weight of history on the mind of civilized man makes this naked confrontation with the immediate sources of poetry more and more difficult.

There are many variations of this myth of decline. To mention several of the more recent, it is a fundamental aspect of the thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau; and it is present in Hegel's notion of a withering away of poetry as the absolute Spirit gradually perfects itself, or in Thomas Love Peacock's *Four Ages of Poetry,* with its picture of a golden civilization producing poets of brass. More influential than Peacock's shrewdly ironic challenge to the idea of progress is Matthew Arnold's anti-modernism. For Arnold, Homer was the best of poets. Poetry, he thought, has gone downhill ever since. The Romantic poets were unable to write the same kind of poetry as Shakespeare because they lived in a different age of the world. "The *what you have to say* depends on your age."[2] The efforts of the Romantic poets were meretricious because they tried to write a kind of poetry possible only in a different time. As Arnold says:

> More and more I feel that the difference between a mature and a youthful age of the world compels the poetry of the former to use great plain-

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ness of speech as compared with that of the latter: and that Keats and Shelley were on a false track when they set themselves to reproduce the exuberance of expression, the charm, the richness of images, and the felicity, of the Elizabethan poets.[3]

Poor Arnold was born in a bad time, a time when the springs of poetry had gone dry. He had to lay his weary bones among the dry rocks of the nineteenth-century wasteland. He lamented the loss in his too-mature time of the world of the "admirable Homeric qualities" of "out-of-doors freshness, life, naturalness, buoyant rapidity."[4] For him, the first writers, like Homer, were closer to the sources of poetry than we are.

This gives rise to a curious paradox of degradation in Arnold's thought: Because the first poets had less to say, they could say it with greater richness and exuberance. We latecomers have inherited the past experience of the world and have added new experience of our own. The result is that we must concentrate what we have to say in a great barrenness of style.

> [H]ad Shakespeare and Milton lived in the atmosphere of modern feeling, had they had the multitude of new thoughts and feelings to deal with a modern has, I think it likely the style of each would have been far less *curious* and exquisite. . . . In the 17th century it was *a smaller harvest than now,* and sooner to be reaped: and therefore to its reaper was left time to stow it more finely and curiously. Still more was this the case in the ancient world. The poet's matter being *the hitherto experience of the world, and his own,* increases with every century.[5]

Try as he may to simplify his style in order to encompass the matter he has to say, the modern poet finds himself overwhelmed with material, much of it inherited from the past. The result is that decadence in poetry happens according to an inevitable historical law. Decadence is defined as a copying of the style and matter of previous masters as opposed to the return to the fecund soil from which poetry has flowered as a fresh and immediate growth. Again, to quote Arnold:

> One does not always remember that one of the signs of the Decadence of a literature, one of the factors of its decadent condition indeed, is this—that new authors attach themselves to the poetic expression the founders of a literature have flowered into, which may be *learned* by a sensitive person, to the neglect of an inward poetic life.[6]

In "The English Poet and the Burden of the Past, 1660-1820,"[7] Walter Jackson Bate has investigated with admirable learning and verve one permutation of this myth. Bate's essay establishes the

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tradition within which Arnold's pessimism may be understood. A "comprehensive way of taking up the whole of English poetry from the middle seventeenth century down to the present," suggests Bate, would be by exploring the "accumulating anxiety" of the burden of the past which presents to each new generation with increasing urgency the question, "What is there left to do?"[8]

> [T]his remorseless deepening of self-consciousness, before the rich and intimidating legacy of the past, becomes the greatest single problem that modern art (art, that is to say, since the close of the seventeenth century) has had to face, and . . . it will become so increasingly in the future.[9]

Taking examples from a wide range of writers in the eighteenth century and in the Romantic period, Bate shows a developing polarity between the virtue of continuity with the past and the virtue of originality. Though his sympathies are for an art that follows with some conscious piety in the line of its ancestors, nevertheless he sees the value of the "never before." There is obviously more than historical objectivity in the intensity with which, at the end of his essay, he describes the plight of the poet who must obey simultaneously two contradictory demands. This was the "fearful legacy" inherited by the great Romantics: "To begin with, you were exhorted to be 'original' at all costs, and yet reminded that you could not be 'original' about the most important things."[10] Being original meant going directly to nature. The opposing virtue was emulation of the great models of the past. Bate sees this opposition as the source of the difficulties and, if one may read between his lines, the decadence of the poetry of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries:

> In no other case are you simultaneously enjoined to admire and at the same time to try, at all costs, *not* to follow closely what you admire, not merely in any of the details but in over-all procedure, in general object, in any of the broader conventions of mode, vocabulary, or idiom. Yet here, in the arts this split is widening with every generation, and not only widening but dramatized, with a helpless and blind militancy on each side. . . . The arts stutter, stagger, pull back into paralysis and indecision before such a conflict of demand.[11]

Torn to pieces by the contrary pulls toward novelty and toward tradition, toward a poetry produced from original soil and "a poetry produced largely from the soil of past poetry,"[12] literature is gradually destroyed by its own success. Ultimately the "burden of the past" becomes impossible to bear. The answer to the question, "What is there left to do?" becomes "Nothing at all," and the poets lapse into impotent silence.

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Beside this dark version of the myth of decline may be set that conception of the "progress of poetry" which Geoffrey Hartman is following with such penetrating subtlety from the late sixteenth century down to our own day.[13] As in the case of Bate's essay, Hartman's point of focus is the eighteenth century and the period of Romanticism. Beginning with Milton and a look backward at Spenser, he shows the ramifications through Gray, Collins, and others down to Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge of a concept of poetry as the purification, rationalizing, or enlightening of a dark, daemonic ground. This notion of poetry as the demystifying of superstitious Romance, "*psyche* emerg[ing] from the spooky larvae of masques and moralities like a free-ranging butterfly,"[14] is to be associated with the widespread Enlightenment topos of the progress of poetry as a "stepping westward" of the poetic spirit from country to country of Europe until finally it must be naturalized on England's shores, there to be "grounded in the reasonableness of a specific national temperament."[15]

The idea of poetry Hartman finds in his authors presupposes the existence of a sub-world of multiple chthonic spirits, a super-nature at the base of nature which the poets must both encounter and tame, "the enlightened mind . . . emerging, and even constructing itself, out of its involvement with Romance."[16]

> With Milton, the Spirit of Romance begins to simplify itself. It becomes the creative spirit, and frees itself from the great mass of medieval and post-medieval romances in the same way as the Spirit of Protestantism from the formalism of temples.[17]

L'Allegro and *Il Penseroso* have special importance for Hartman as a turning point in this development. "They show a mind moving from one position to another and projecting an image of its freedom against a darker, daemonic ground. Poetry, like religion, purifies that ground: it cannot leave it."[18] Poems as late as Wordsworth's *The White Doe of Rylstone*, however, still have the same structure, "that of the reflective encirclement and progressive purification of symbols from Romance."[19] In Hartman's view, in fact, this is the permanent structure of all authentic poetry:

> If Romance is an eternal rather than archaic portion of the human mind, and poetry its purification, then every poem will be an act of resistance, of negative creation—a flight from one enchantment into another. The farewell to the impure gods becomes part of a nativity ode welcoming the new god.[20]

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The question posed by this conception of poetry is "whether poetry can survive its own 'enlightenment,' 'civilization,' or 'self-consciousness.'"[21] This is a version of the image of progressive degeneration proposed by W. J. Bate. As the daemonic ground that is the source of poetry is gradually brought into the light and subjected to the control of a human mind no longer the helpless victim of supernatural energies, poetry may get more and more fragile and superficial, mere *vers de société.* In this process of deterioration,

> Romance loses its shadow, its genuine darkness: nothing remains of the drama of liberation whereby ingenium is born from Genius, psyche from persona, and the spirit of poetry from the grave-clothes of Romance.[22]

Since some form of mythological machinery is necessary to all true poetry, another way to ask this question is to wonder whether demystification also means, inevitably, demythologizing.[23] Only if poetry can be enlightened without losing its contact with myth and with the archaic forces that are its origin can the progress of poetry be other than an effacement of poetry.

A final form of this notion will return to the question of progress in humanistic studies. If the enlightenment of the poets will perhaps make poetry impossible, the development of sophisticated techniques of interpretation may also hasten the destruction of poetry. An age of criticism and an age of abundant creativity cannot occur simultaneously, Matthew Arnold believed. The assumption that a proliferation of elaborate methods of analysis—rationalizing poetry, dissecting it, and finding out its secret—makes it less and less possible for the poets to write poetry is widespread in our own century. "Fruitless for the academic tapeworm to hoard its excrementa in books," says William Carlos Williams in *Spring and All.*[24] This assumption is also present in the modesty of those critics who freely admit that their work has only a negative relation to the creation of poetry. Literary criticism is a part of science that happens to take poems as its objects of study rather than stars or atoms. If authenticity in poetry arises from unthinking spontaneity in its creation, the study of poetry is its bringing to consciousness, its interpretation, and therefore its destruction. Criticism is the act whereby the critic puts an end to the objects that are his *raison d'être.* This version of the myth of decline reminds one of those delicate cave or tomb paintings that vanish when they are exposed to light and air. The critic is a graverobber who destroys what he means to steal. He

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leaves only bare walls where once were masterpieces of primitive and unsophisticated creativity.

Meanwhile the poems remain, in the undiminished splendor of their presence. Far from being the epoch of the vanishing of poetry, the twentieth century has witnessed a remarkable flourishing of all the arts. We have had poets, painters, composers, and playwrights able to hold their own against any in history. At the same time the various modes of interpretation have been impressively practiced. There must be something wrong with these prophecies of doom for poetry. Moreover, it does not take much wit to see that the two myths, that of progress and that of decline, have homologous structures. They are, in fact, mirror images of one another, or they are like the "two" sides of a Moebius strip which returns to itself from the other side if it is followed to its limit. This further suggests that something is amiss, since poetry can hardly progress and decline at the same time.

My examples of the myths of progress and of decline are structured around a fundamental polarity. In both, the undivided presence of the mind to itself is opposed to the split in the mind when it becomes conscious of itself. A sophisticated self-consciousness in the poet inhibits his creativity. Self-consciousness in the critic, an objective holding at arm's length of the poem, a peeping and botanizing at the flowers of poetry, destroys what it would understand. The presence to nature of an unreflective mind in the immediate moment of direct experience, in the presence of the present or the nick of time, is opposed to any mediate relation to nature by way of cultural forms inherited from the past. These are seen as forming an increasingly opaque screen cutting the mind off from nature and from its own depths. Whether the springs of poetry are thought of as outside, in the perennial freshness of nature, or as within, in the interior regions of the mind, where no artificial forms can come, the category of immediacy, of presence, of proximity to the origin, is the basic test of validity. True poetry must rise spontaneously, as a spring bubbles from a cleft in the rocks or as a wild flower lifts itself from the primeval earth. Once this criterion of authenticity is assumed, there appears inevitably the paradox of a progress of poetry that is at the same time an exhaustion of poetry. Poetry itself comes to stand as an implacable barrier between man and what makes poetry possible. Man must then live encapsulated in a culture which is factitious in the sense that it has been detached from its roots. A

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finished civilization is like a bunch of cut flowers in a vase. Though there might be "progress in the humanities" in such a culture, an increasing perfection in the establishing of texts, facts, and explications, this is an increasing perfection in the embalming of dead forms, forms with less and less function or relevance.

Against this unhappy prospect stands the fact that the arts and their interpretation have neither declined nor progressed, but exist more or less as they always have, just as the poems of the past remain available to those who would read them. One begins to suspect that the myths of progress and decline must be based on false ideas of culture, of history, of human temporality, of consciousness, of poetic language, and of interpretation.

A clue to the way this is so is given in W. J. Bate's healthy distaste for the Hegelian *Zeitgeist*, for the concept of periodization in the arts when it implies that there is a climate of ideas and forms irresistibly limiting what can be thought or created in a given age.[25] A further clue is Bate's recognition that the great artists have always built on their predecessors. Their works do not spring full-blown from the immediate moment, but are always products of emulation or even of plagiarism. Each great poem incorporates some reference to anterior works to which it is related in a complex combination of sameness and difference. In Bate's words:

> It is like that habit of Keats of beginning each large new effort by rereading *Lear* and of keeping always close at hand that engraving of Shakespeare which he found in the lodging house in the Isle of Wight when he went off to begin *Endymion;* in a sense, what this typifies was true of them all: true at least of the greatest artists (Wordsworth, looking constantly back as he did to Milton; Beethoven, who in his last days kept rereading the scores of Handel; Goethe, who constantly returned to the Greeks or to Shakespeare).[26]

Another hint is given by a tension or fold in the thought of Geoffrey Hartman's essays. On the one hand, there is the idea of a slow purification of the dark sources of poetry until finally, one may imagine, all the darkness will be light. On the other hand stands Hartman's affirmation that there is no progress, only an eternal reenactment of the same dangerous encounter, since poetry must always return to its daemonic ground. "This romantic purification of Romance," says Hartman, "is endless; it is the true and unceasing spiritual combat."[27] In one case, poetry is seen as the progressive victory of light over darkness, as a secularizing, humanizing force. In the other case, poetry must constantly renew itself in the dark-

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ness if it is to remain authentic. There is no progress of poetry, no one-way development of literary history through various periods which build on one another, each new one leaving the other behind forever. There is only a perpetual replaying of the same drama in different forms. In one case, Orpheus wants to make Eurydice over into a white bride fit to live all the year in the sunlight. In the other, Orpheus' impossible and perpetually renewed task is to bring Eurydice into the light with all her rich darkness still clinging to her.

To follow these clues out of the labyrinth of a situation in which our habits of thought lead us by serpentine windings until we find ourselves face to face with a paradoxical conclusion in obvious contradiction with the facts, it may be useful to investigate a single text. In such a text my tangle of themes may be present not haphazardly, as they have appeared dispersed in a multitude of writers old and new, but articulated in the more closely-knit web of a single work. William Carlos Williams' *Spring and All* is an admirable work of this sort.

Spring and All was printed at Dijon in 1923 and published by the Contact Publishing Company, one of Williams' joint enterprises with Robert McAlmon. It is a handsome little book bound in blue paper covers, dedicated to Williams' friend, the painter Charles Demuth. *Spring and All* has never been republished in its entirety, though in its integral form it is perhaps the most important single work by Williams. "Nobody ever saw it," he says, "—it had no circulation at all—but I had a lot of fun with it."[28] It contains two of Williams' most famous lyrics, "By the road to the contagious hospital" and "The Red Wheelbarrow," along with twenty-five others. The poems are dispersed among passages of prose, some of which are prose poems in the manner of Williams' earlier *Kora in Hell* (1920) or of Rimbaud's *Illuminations*, and some of which are Williams' fullest statements of his theory of poetry.

One aspect of *Spring and All* will make it possible to follow somewhat further one of the clues out of the labyrinth cited above from W. J. Bate. In spite of the absolute value Williams here and elsewhere puts on making it new in America, *Spring and All* is self-consciously imitative of Rimbaud and the Surrealists. "Thank you," says Williams at one particularly Rimbaudian moment, "I know well what I am plagiarising."[29] Moreover, the book doubles back on itself and contains its own interpretation. Just as *Kora in Hell* is made up of prose poems and "interpretations" of them written

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later,[30] so in *Spring and All* the prose passages present the theory of imaginative action exemplified in the poems. These are strewn throughout the prose like gemstones in clay. "Who am I," asks Williams, "but my own critic?" (SA, 36) The poems sometimes come with fine dramatic suddenness. This is seen most strikingly when a discussion in the prose of what would make the complete novelty of spring possible is followed immediately by the celebrated enactment of spring burgeoning in "By the road to the contagious hospital." Such dramatic interaction between the prose and the poetry is lost in the publication of the poems alone in *The Collected Earlier Poems.* If *Spring and All* has its pre-texts, it is also divided within itself between text and interpretation. The critic adds his interpretation to the text as one more link in a chain. Far from springing without a past from the immediate moment of experience, *Spring and All* is interpretation of previous texts and even interpretation of interpretation. It is caught already in the serpent spirals of the hermeneutical circle. The critic's commentary engages itself in the circle and adds one more twist to the screw.

This structure of self-interpretation is characteristic in one way or another of all literature and of all art. Every poem has other poems anterior to it to which it refers in one way or another. It also contains linguistic elements which are self-referential or "metapoetical." Some language in the poem is about the poem itself. The combination of overt critical discussion and poetry in *Spring and All* is only an unusually visible example of this, not something rare in literature. Critical discourse is language about language which is already about its own language. The language of the poem in its turn is about other poems which precede it and to which it is "allegorically" related.[31] These earlier poems also have anterior texts to which they refer in an endless sequence, each item referring back to earlier ones or ahead to the ones not yet written in a movement of meaning without origin or end. If this is so, the critic of *Spring and All* need not fear that the text is a fragile tissue he will destroy by interpreting. His reading inserts itself in the texture of words which is already there and follows one thread or another in the weaving as it tries to identify a fundamental pattern. In this case the background design is a network of contradictions and tensions in aesthetic theory as old as Plato and Aristotle. Apparently without full awareness of its lineage, Williams has knitted this pattern into his text. The poems that matter and the interpretations that mater are not the ones that "dissolve"

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such contradictions, for they cannot be unravelled, but those that "elucidate" them, to use one of the key words of *Spring and All.*

The verbal tissue of *Spring and All* is made up of the repetition, modulation, and connection of such key words as they weave in and out of the text creating various patterns and combinations. Among them, along with "elucidate," are "spring," "beginning," "new," "alleviation," "enlargement," "imagination," "force," "life," "sympathy," "composition," "design," "dynamize," "reality," "nature," "the moment," "transcription," "fixation," "value," "truth," "invention," "name," "experience," "repetition," "representation," "imitation," "copy," "plagiarism," "illusion," and "symbolism." These words arrange themselves in two groups, the larger related to "spring," immediacy, "life," and newness; the smaller polarized around the notions of "repetition" and "imitation."

In perfect consonance with the tradition explored earlier in this essay, *Spring and All* is based on an affirmation of the supreme value of presence and of the present, and on a repudiation of all that is derived, repetitive, and copied. This opposition is initially given an overtly temporal expression. Authentic life exists only in the present moment of immediate experience, but most people live detached from that moment. They remain lost in memory of the no longer real past, or in anticipation of the not yet existing future, or in thoughts about some distant place. They are unable to concentrate on what is here and now, before the senses. According to Williams:

> There is a constant barrier between the reader and his consciousness of immediate contact with the world. . . . [T]he whole world is between: Yesterday, tomorrow, Europe, Asia, Africa,—all things removed and impossible, the tower of the church at Seville, the Parthenon. . . . The reader knows himself as he was twenty years ago and he has also in mind a vision of what he would be, some day. Oh, some day! But the thing he never knows and never dares to know is what he is at the exact moment that he is. And this moment is the only thing in which I am at all interested. (1, 2, 3)

Among the most impenetrable substances standing as a screen between man and the present moment is traditional art, the art of "illusion," "representation," and the "copy after nature." "[N]early all writing, up to the present," says Williams, "if not all art, has been especially designed to keep up the barrier between sense and the vaporous fringe which distracts the attention from its agonized approaches to the moment. It has been always a search for 'the beautiful illusion.'" (3) Art adds itself in "layers of demoded words and shapes" (19) to the vaporous fringe of the past, the future, and the

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distant to double the barrier between consciousness and the luminous center of the moment. Art is, like past and future, like all things removed and distant, a form of the mediate, the secondary. The most resolute repudiation ever expressed of the tradition of mimetic art runs as a continuous filament through *Spring and All*. Representational artists are "the traditionalists of plagiarism." (10, 15) They commit themselves to "the falseness of attempting to 'copy' nature." (30) Such copying is the "crude symbolism" of "strained associations." (22) It is "plagiarism after nature" (35):

> I suppose Shakespeare's familiar aphorism about holding the mirror up to nature has done more harm in stabilizing the copyist tendency of the arts among us than—[sic] the mistake in it . . . is to have believed that the reflection of nature is nature. It is not. It is only a sham nature, a "lie." (50, 51)

Williams glimpses the indissoluble connection of the art of *mimesis* with symbolism, with subjectivism, and with the notion that the center or origin of the objective world, of man's subjectivity, and of artistic forms is located in another world. What Williams rejects as "crude symbolism" is the traditional universe of hierarchical levels in participation, whereby things of the outer world are properly symbols of qualities in man's subjective world. This correspondence is validated by the resonance of both with the supernatural center that is their source. "Crude symbolism," says Williams, "is to associate emotions with natural phenomena such as anger with lightning, flowers with love. . . . Such work is empty." (20) Elsewhere, speaking of the way the paintings of Juan Gris detach the things of everyday experience and present them in unfamiliar juxtapositions, making it impossible for the onlooker to think of the canvas as a photographic representation of reality, Williams brings to the surface the association of representational art with subjectivism and with belief in an extraterrestrial center:

> This [the "distortion" of Juan Gris] was not necessary where the subject of art was not "reality" but related to the "gods"—by force or otherwise. There was no need of the "illusion" in such a case since there was none possible where a picture or a work represented simply the imaginative reality which existed in the mind of the onlooker. (35)

In rejecting the art of imitation, Williams wants also to reject those other elements—symbolism, subjectivism, and supernaturalism—with which it is systematically connected. All these aspects of art stand between man and the living moment. The whole fabric must go. "Exit the whole shebang."[32]

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The project of *Spring and All* is a version of that "deconstruction of metaphysics" that has been a recurrent theme in Western thought and that is particularly to be associated in its modern form with Friedrich Neitzsche. What, for Williams, will be the instrument of this prodigious act of demolition? What power in man can blow up all the barriers and return man to the moment? The answer is unequivocal: "To refine, to clarify, to intensify that eternal moment in which we alone live there is but a single force—the imagination. This is its book." (3) The prose of *Spring and All* centers on a definition or redefinition of this traditional romantic term. The imagination is the only power that can reach through all obstacles to the reality of the present moment. Williams uses language drawn from physics to describe how this happens:

> [T]he imagination is an actual force comparable to electricity or steam, it is not a plaything but a power that has been used from the first to raise the understanding of—[Here as often Williams leaves the reader to fill in the missing words, in this case, I suppose, "life," "nature," "reality," "the moment."] . . . [T]he work of the imagination [is] not "like" anything but [is] transfused with the same forces which transfuse the earth—at least one small part of them. (49, 50)

The imagination is that energy in man through which flows the same force as that outside man, creating weeds, stones, trees, and white chickens. The imagination is part of nature. By its means the poet can cast out all the past, all inherited and demoded forms. He can then turn directly to nature as it is now present before the senses, activating his liaison with it.

Turn to nature in what way? What, in fact, is the work of the imagination? Here Williams' thought turns curiously back on itself and then even redoubles that doubling. The imagination is, in one sense, a creative force linking man to nature. The poems and paintings produced by the imagination grow from nature and remain rooted in it. The compositions of great writers like Homer, says Williams, "have as their excellence an identity with life since they are as actual, as sappy as the leaf of the tree which never moves from one spot." (22) (Here is Williams' version of Matthew Arnold's admiration for the immediacy and freshness of Homer.) In another sense, however, the imagination is a destructive force, perhaps the most powerful explosive of all. It has power to annihilate everything. Though it is part of nature, its essential function is to destroy nature. The opening pages of *Spring and All* express a joy-

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ous dedication to the destruction of the world. The instrument of this annihilation is the imagination:

> The imagination, intoxicated by prohibitions, rises to drunken heights to destroy the world. Let it rage, let it kill. The imagination is supreme. . . . To it now we come to dedicate our secret project: The annihilation of every human creature on the face of the earth. . . . None to remain; nothing but the lower vertebrates, the mollusks, insects and plants. Then at last will the world be made anew. (5, 6)

It is easy to see the rigorous logic according to which the imagination must be destructive as well as creative. As Williams says in the fifteenth poem of *Spring and All*, "destruction and creation/are simultaneous." (59) If dead forms of language stand between man and the novelty of the moment, so also do those objects in nature already there a moment or a decade ago. The first movement of the imagination must, therefore, be violently anarchistic, the "destruction of what is," to borrow the slogan of the Professor in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*. The pre-text here is again Rimbaud's *Illuminations*. In "Conte," for example, a bored prince dedicates himself to sadistic cruelty:

> All the women who had known him were assassinated; what havoc in the garden of beauty! . . . He amused himself cutting the throats of rare animals. He set palaces on fire. He would rush upon people and hack them to pieces.[33]

Like Rimbaud, Williams must break down all cultural and natural forms, kill everyone, and destroy everything in order to return things to the primal chaos from which a reality without any antecedents may spring.

As in the case of Conrad's Professor, Williams' destructive rage must be directed especially against mankind. Human beings most remember the past or anticipate the future and therefore are the least real. "I love my fellow creature," says Williams. "Jesus, how I love him: endways, sideways, frontways and all the other ways—but he doesn't exist! Neither does she. I do, in a bastardly sort of way." (3) Since the subjectivity of ordinary humankind is perhaps the most recalcitrant way in which the unreal corrupts the real, it must be the special target of imaginative action. It can be erased first by being merged in the imagination of the poet-protagonist. He does exist, in a bastardly sort of way, because he lives in the imagination: "In the imagination, we are from henceforth (so long as you read) locked in a fraternal embrace, the classic caress of author and reader.

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We are one." (3, 4) Williams' readers must abandon their separate selves and lose themselves in the imagination of the poet, sharing with him there in the action whereby every man, woman, and child on the face of the earth is annihilated. In this annihilation all the separate unreal minds are merged in a single real soul:

> This final and self inflicted holocaust has been all for love, for sweetest love, that together the human race, yellow, black, brown, red and white, agglutinated into one enormous soul may be gratified with the sight . . . . (6)

Once this monstrous act of demolition has been satisfactorily completed, the world will be new, and the imagination can turn from acts of destruction to acts of authentic creation. Here, however, Williams' turns back on himself unexpectedly a second time. The world after its destruction is not new at all. It repeats itself exactly again from the beginning, down to the last detail. If an art of *mimesis* is bad because it is sterile copying, there is in nature a similar tendency toward plagiarism. Williams' hyperbolic act of destruction leads him only to witness the comedy of a nature which, destroyed so that spring may begin, repeats itself exactly as it was, as if it had not wit or energy enough to be different:

> It is spring! but miracle of miracles a miraculous miracle has gradually taken place during these seemingly wasted eons. Through the orderly sequences of unmentionable time EVOLUTION HAS REPEATED ITSELF FROM THE BEGINNING. . . . Every step once taken in the first advance of the human race, from the amoeba to the highest type of intelligence, has been duplicated, every step exactly paralleling the one that preceded in the dead ages gone by. A perfect plagiarism results. Everything is and is new. Only the imagination is undeceived. (8, 9)

The imagination is undeceived because it can see that nothing has been accomplished; there has been no return to a primal novelty. Nature is capable only of a dead imitation of that which was. This doubling brings into the open nature's sterility. Nature cannot return to an origin which is other than a repetition of something that has already happened innumerable times before. This barrenness in nature is also a limitation in the imagination, that derived force of nature. The enormous energy of the imagination is able to destroy everything, but can then create on the basis of the resulting chaos, not "the unheard of work,"[34] but only a repetition of what was there before: "Yes, the imagination, drunk with prohibitions, has destroyed and re-created everything afresh in the likeness of that which it was." (9) In the same way, the Prince's murders and burnings in

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Rimbaud's "Conte" leave things untouched: "The throngs, the gilded roofs, the beautiful animals still remained."[35] Williams has followed through the same line of imaginative thought as Rimbaud and has come face to face once more with the same blank wall. He repeats Rimbaud's celebrated failure to use the poetic imagination as a revolutionary force. For Williams as for Rimbaud, it seems, "There is no sovereign music for our desire."[36]

The parallel is not exact, however, and in Williams' case the impasse is not an impasse. At the moment when the repetition in nature is complete and the universe has returned to exactly the point where it was before, so that the two natures could be superimposed exactly, like two maps made to the same grid or "grate," suddenly the movement of repetition ends. The spring, so far unsuccessfully sought, miraculously appears in "By the road to the contagious hospital," following immediately after this passage in the prose:

> [L]ife has now arrived for the second time at that exact moment when in the ages past the destruction of the species *Homo sapiens* occurred./Now at last that process of miraculous verisimilitude, that grate[37] copying which evolution has followed, repeating move for move every move that it made in the past—is approaching the end./Suddenly it is at an end. THE WORLD IS NEW. (11)

Here is revealed the sovereign power of the imagination. Left alone, nature repeats itself. Destroyed, it repeats itself again. Only when it is repeated in a certain way in words is it new: "The only means [the poet] has to give value to life is to recognise it with the imagination and name it; this is so. To repeat and repeat the thing without naming it is only to dull the sense and results in frustration." (41, 42) What is the difference between repeating and naming? It would seem that naming could only be another form of the aesthetic of imitation Williams is making every effort to reject. In elucidating the distinction between naming and repeating, Williams finds a way out of the dilemma he faces. The poems in *Spring and All* are examples of the power of imaginative naming. Or rather he finds a way to balance among the three irreconcilable and yet inextricably connected theories of art that have dominated Western thought since the Greeks. These three theories unobtrusively govern the argument of *Spring and All.* Art as *mimesis,* art as revelation, art as creation *ex nihilo*—these three regal ideas are present in the distinction Williams makes between words as repetition, words as names, and words as "unoriented sounds." (92). Though he rejects

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the first and last and chooses the second, he cannot free his theory or his practice from the contradictory inherence of each of these notions in the others.

In developing his version of this traditional pattern of thought, Williams makes use implicitly of two concepts of repetition. On the one hand, there is the sterile imitation of the exact copy; this form of repetition is integral to the Platonic system Williams rejects. Platonism connects the idea of repetition as the eternal return of the same with the idea of art as mimesis. Moreover, both are to be associated with the notion of a divine center that is principle and model. The cosmological image of the universe as a round in which the same eternally returns because nature is a copy of fixed ideas in the mind of the One is doubled in an aesthetic theory of art as the copy of a copy, a mirror up to nature. In both cases, legitimacy lies in the exactness of the duplication, since both nature and art are valid only insofar as they imitate a divine model.

Against this form of repetition, Williams sets the notion of a repetition based on difference. On this concept he builds his theory of imaginative naming. The poem must not be an exact repetition in words of the object it describes. On the other hand, it cannot be made of nonsense sounds—that is, of words freed from their usual function as names of objects, words turned into sounds approaching pure music:

> According to my present theme the writer of imagination would attain closest to the conditions of music not when his words are disassociated from natural objects and specified meanings but when they are liberated from the usual quality of that meaning by transposition into another medium, the imagination. (92)

The key to Williams' theory of imagination is the idea that the imagination is a natural force making possible the re-creation of physical objects in a different form—that is, in their names. The object is a thing; it really exists. The poem is another real, existing thing. The two things echo one another at a distance. In a world where there is no divine center to control the production of meaning out of the juxtaposition of differences, they create resemblance out of difference. The destruction of nature by the imagination is both good and bad, bad because it accomplishes nothing. Nature repeats itself exactly after being destroyed. The destruction of nature is good because it is necessary to the naming that uses another form of the energies running through nature to re-create it in a new form.

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Imaginative naming is creative repetition in a double sense. The verbal form duplicates what it names with a difference, and the different elements imagination gives rise to echo one another. From this echoing, meaning is created. This generation of meaning through resonance is present in *Spring and All* in two ways. In even the simplest of the poems, multiple objects from multiple sources rise into the realm of the imagination. "By the road to the contagious hospital," for example, describes the appearance all over the drab New Jersey landscape of the shrubs and weeds of spring:

> All along the road the reddish
> purplish, forked, upstanding, twiggy
> stuff of bushes and small trees . . . (12)

So much depends on the red wheelbarrow, to cite another example, not because it is supremely important in itself, but because it can momentarily be taken as the center of the world with other objects set beside it (in this case, the white chickens). In this way, meaning may arise from the juxtaposition. The other poems in *Spring and All* often work even more obviously according to a technique of the juxtaposition of the disparate: for example, the mixture of natural and urban details in the eighth poem, or the series of "unrelated" images in the eleventh, or the montage of seascape and cityscape in number thirteen, or the evocation of the crowd at a ball game in the twenty-sixth poem with its multitude of the unthinking masses which is "beautiful" "in detail." (89)

In all these poems the underlying assumption is the same. "Anywhere is everywhere" in Williams' world.[38] Williams' universe, unlike the Platonic cosmos, has no center, no reservoir of eternal models. There is only the ubiquitous life force which gives rise to differences in objects appearing side by side or in sequence from an infinity of centers. Out of the resemblances which occur by accident among these objects, meaning is created. No one place is the center or origin in this non-hierarchical world because the center is everywhere. This is why Williams pays such loving attention to random, ugly, "anti-poetical" objects. The wheelbarrow, the scrawny magnolia raising "its straggling branches of ivorywhite flowers" by the millworkers' shack (6), street signs or posters (87, 88), "the broken pieces of the city" (41), "the small/yellow cinquefoil in the/parched places" (46), "a girl with one leg/over the rail of a balcony" (48)—all are important, all equally important, because all exist, all have sprung up from the "unfathomable ground"[39] to manifest themselves

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in the open. "It is only in isolate flecks that/something/is given off" (67). Any one of these flecks may be taken as the point on which everything depends and around which it turns.

This creation of meaning by the resonance of adjacent objects is echoed by the theory of language on which these poems are based. To name things with the imagination allows them to remain as they are. It liberates words from the necessity of "describing" things that have no need of being labelled. "In description," says Williams wittily, "words adhere to certain objects and have the effect on the sense of oysters, or barnacles." (90) Naming frees words from such adhesion to become independent energies with which the poet creates a new object—the poem:

> The word is not liberated, therefore able to communicate release from the fixities which destroy it until it is accurately tuned to the fact which giving it reality, by its own reality establishes its own freedom from the necessity of a word, thus freeing it and dynamizing it at the same time. (93)

Once words have been given reality and energy by their distant attunement to the things they name, an interaction among words analogous to the interaction among things in nature creates meaning in the poem. Words set side by side are forces that jostle one another. Out of this jostling of differences grows a new energy exceeding the sum of forces going into it. This dynamism gives the poem as a whole an exorbitant movement in one direction or another, all the words rising together to create that sense of enlargement or alleviation, the essential effect for Williams of a successful poem. This movement of the words together affirms simultaneously the reality of the objects named and the separate reality of the poem:

> Either to write or to comprehend poetry the words must be recognized to be moving in a direction separate from the jostling or lack of it which occurs within the piece. . . . As birds' wings beat the solid air without which none could fly so words freed by the imagination affirm reality by their flight. (86, 91)

I have tried elsewhere to show that Williams' best lyric poetry exemplifies his theory of naming.[40] These extraordinarily beautiful poems almost successfully resist analysis because in them, as Williams said there should be, there are "no ideas but in things." Their beauty depends on a delicate harmony of rhythm and sound pattern as much as on any analyzable meaning. The placing of the words on

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the page, especially at the ends of lines, makes these words (often articles, adverbs, pronouns, or prepositions little noticed in our speech) stand out in their verbal power as nodes of linguistic energy. Each word has the power to combine with other words in that jostling which produces meaning:

> Now the grass, tomorrow
> the stiff curl of wildcarrot leaf
>
> One by one objects are defined—
> It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf
>
> But now the stark dignity of
> entrance—Still, the profound change
>
> has come upon them: rooted they
> grip down and begin to awaken
>
> ("By the road to the contagious hospital," 12,13)

Or this, from "The farmer in deep thought," the third poem in *Spring and All,* in which the antagonist farmer, as the obstetrician, elsewhere, is an allegory for the poet. Both poet and farmer bring things out in the open, coax them into the light from their occultation in "the earth under our feet:[41]

> Down past the brushwood
> bristling by
> the rainsluiced wagonroad
> looms the artist figure of
> the farmer—composing
> —antagonist (17)

In their use of words, such poems as these have, more than the poems of Yeats, Stevens, Eliot, or Frost, fathered what is most vital in poetry being written today in the United States and even in England, where Williams' importance has recently been recognized and his influence spread. The prose in *Spring and All* is the discursive statement of doctrine, a doctrine, moreover, that is divided against itself, split into several incompatible strands. The poems emerge suddenly out of the lively ruminations of this prose as another sort of thing altogether, as the happening which the prose attempts to describe and justify. The poems are the abrupt opening of the luminous space of poetry—like the unforeseen appearance of the "radiant gist" in the bottom of Marie Curie's retort.[42] In the best of Williams' poems, the ideas expressed in the prose do become

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things, verbal substances composed or incarnated out of the syntactical energy of words. Such word-things reconcile in their visible presence the contradictions and tensions of the prose. The poems are imitations, in their movement, in their diction, and even in their shape on the page, of the things they name. They are also a manifestation of those things in their radiance, as they emerge out of the ground beneath. In addition, through the interaction of the words, they create separate and new objects.

Nevertheless, it is not clear what Williams means when he says that in poetry words "affirm reality by their flight." He has repeatedly asserted that "reality needs no personal support but exists free from human action." (91) The imagination seems no more than a mode of the life force that has the power to create "new forms as additions to nature." (78) Williams, however, grants the imagination a special, one might even say "extra-natural," function. Once more, his thought is traditional, its roots reaching back to the beginnings of Western thought. Like the tradition lying behind it, his theory of art is unable to free itself from the theories it rejects.

In Aristotle's *Poetics*, imitation is natural to man and, therefore, a part of nature. The pleasure man takes in performing or in witnessing acts of imitation is also natural and, therefore, also part of nature. This delight is man's natural pleasure in learning. In the words of Aristotle:

> As to its general origin, we may say that Poetry has sprung from two causes, each of them a thing inherent in human nature. The first is the habit of imitation; for to imitate is instinctive with mankind; and man is superior to the other animals, for one thing, in that he is the most imitative of creatures, and learns at first by imitation. Secondly, all men take a natural pleasure in the products of imitation . . . . The explanation of this delight lies in a further characteristic of our species, the appetite for learning; for among human pleasures that of learning is the keenest . . . .[43]

Aristotle, therefore, grants a sovereign role in human life to the *mimesis* enacted in a poem, in a play, or even in a simple metaphor. Metaphor he rightly sees as basic to poetry. "A command of metaphor," he says, is "the mark of genius" in a poet, for metaphor is "the application to one thing of the name that belongs to another," and "to coin good metaphors involves an insight into the resemblances between objects that are superficially unlike."[44] In *mimesis* the underlying *logos* of nature is destroyed in its sovereign oneness by being differentiated into the multiplicity of individual words. In the metaphoric interaction of words, the *logos* is brought into the

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open by mimetic repetition, but it is uncovered in a transferred form. In metaphor, the *logos* is destroyed and revealed at once.[45]

The same structure of thought organizes *Spring and All,* in spite of the violence of Williams' attack on the aesthetic of imitation. The key terms he uses to describe the action of imagination—"value," "life," "truth"—are again traditional. Though there may be an echo of Wordsworth in his formulation, his claim that reality is revealed and therefore brought into existence for man only in the work of art is no more romantic than it is Aristotelian:

> Taught by the largeness of his imagination to feel every form which he sees moving within himself, he must prove the truth of this by expression. . . . Only when this position is reached can life proper be said to begin since only then can a value be affixed to the forms and activities of which it consists. . . . It is not necessary to count every flake of the truth that falls; it is necessary to dwell in the imagination if the truth is to be numbered. . . . [I]n great works of the imagination A CREATIVE FORCE IS SHOWN AT WORK MAKING OBJECTS WHICH ALONE COMPLETE SCIENCE AND ALLOW INTELLIGENCE TO SURVIVE . . . . [L]ife becomes actual only when it is identified with ourselves. When we name it, life exists. (27-28, 36, 37, 41)

Only in the poem or painting is the truth of nature "elucidated" in the sense of "brought to light," made available to human intelligence. This elucidation, in a recurrent theme of *Spring and All,* produces the "enlargement" or lightening men feel "before great or good work, an expansion." (29) It is as if men had been released from a great burden and had come into an open space—it is the opening of revelation. Though value, life, and truth are already in nature, they are hidden, coming into existence only when the poet names natural objects. This naming brings them into that domain of the imagination where they may, in their jostling, transcend themselves in the creation of meaning. Such an art is at once *mimesis,* for "the same things exist, but in a different condition when energized by the imagination," (75) and *aletheia,* for in art alone is the hidden truth of nature uncovered, and creation, since in art a new object is brought into existence. The "truth" exists only when it is "numbered," named, "invented," and given compositional form. In its naming it becomes "actual"—that is, present. In poetic naming Williams at last takes possession of the presence of the present, "that eternal moment in which we alone live." He takes possession of it in the imagination—that is, as translated into the secondary reality of its image. This new or secondary reality performs the essential func-

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tion of poetry, which for Williams, as for so many writers before him, is to be a mediator between man and primary reality. Great works of art "stand between man and nature as saints once stood between man and the sky," (38) and the authentic art work "is new, immediate—It is so because it is actual, always real. It is experience dynamized into reality." (68) Like Aristotle's *mimesis*, Williams' imagination is both part of and more than nature, both immediate and mediatorial—imitation, revelation, and creation at once. Like the long tradition he echoes, Williams remains caught in the inextricable web of connection among these concepts.

This returns us to the question of progress in the humanities. Is *Spring and All* an example of the progress of poetry? Does it transcend or improve upon its predecessors? Does it do something never done before? Has my interpretation of it, my unweaving or following through of some of its threads, accomplished anything? Have I destroyed the text, distorted it, elucidated it, preserved it, created it anew, or copied it? The answer to all these questions is both yes and no. Williams' insight into the relation between his poems and the objects they name will suggest how this is so. A poem in *Spring and All* is apposed to the natural objects it names. The same forces flow through it as flow through nature, so it is an object in its own right, and yet it is also a repetition in another form of the object it names. It is a natural object, but more than a natural object. The meaning of the poem arises from the juxtaposition of differences, not from the exact duplication of the same. For Williams difference is the basis of resemblance, not sameness the basis of difference. In a similar way the relation of *Spring and All* to its antecedents is an example of repetition with a difference, a new weaving of old threads which keeps the old meanings alive. This is both progress and stasis. My interpretation, in its turn, both destroys the text it interprets and, I hope, revivifies it. Such a "deconstruction" puts in question the received ideas of our tradition. At the same time my reading keeps the text alive by reliving it. It works back through its texture, repeats it once more in a different form, in a version of that transit through the texts of our heritage called for by Jacques Derrida:

> It is necessary . . . to remain within the difficulty of the passage [through the tradition of Western ontology], to repeat it in a rigorous reading of metaphysics wherever it normalizes occidental discourse and not only in the texts of the "history of philosophy."[46]

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This "rigorous reading" is not a demolition in the sense of going beyond or outside the tradition; it is not a question of a breakthrough beyond metaphysics or of a "reversal of Platonism." This reversal has been performed over and over through the centuries, from the Stoics to Nietzsche and the radical philosophers of our own day, and yet Platonism still reigns. In fact, the reversal of Platonism is perhaps performed first within the Platonic dialogues themselves.[47] It remains inscribed within the Platonic tradition as its double, inextricably part of it through two and half millennia. It is impossible to go beyond or outside this tradition because there is, for Western man, nothing outside the structure of the various languages that limits the possibilities of his thought. (I leave aside the challenging question of whether extra-European languages, Far Eastern or primitive tongues, for example, are outside these limits.) Nor can interpretation succeed in explaining a text away by identifying its origin, its "profound meaning." The interpreter of a given text can only in one way or another enter inside its play of language. "Progress" in humanistic studies does not mean discovering new facts or offering a definitive explication of one text or another. It means uncovering what has been there all along written into the words. In the same way there is no progress in human history, no unfolding or gradual perfection of the spirit. There are only endlessly varied ways to experience the human situation. Constitutive of this situation is the opening through language of temporality and a consequent distance from any origin or end. Beginning and end are exposed for the first time as shadows generated by language itself. This "first time" has always already happened, even with the first poems or with the first cave paintings. There is no progress because there is no beginning, no fixed center outside the interaction of words or signs on the basis of which progress could be measured.

The humanist must try to achieve as fully as possible a possession of the systematic connection of words and images within our tradition. If there has been "progress" in interpretation in the last century and a half, a progress sometimes associated with the names of Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche,[48] this advance has not been a movement beyond the tradition, the founding of a new historical era. It is, at most, a new way of possessing where we are and what we are, a way that more clearly understands the network of metaphors and concepts within which we live. Such a way recognizes as already present in the texts, part of their self-interpretative integument, the concepts of interpretation history, progress, text, presence, consciousness, and

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temporality, which are our indispensable instruments of interpretation. Meaning is not something already there, outside the work as its center or model. It springs from within the text. As Gilles Deleuze puts it, "meaning is never a principle or origin, it is a product. It is not something to discover, to restore, nor to re-employ, it is something to produce by new mechanisms."[49] The business of the humanistic scholar is the appropriation of the texts of the past. This is an unending process of interpreting that which is itself an interpretation. In this process the same is maintained by means of the differential repetition which destroys and creates meaning at once. The meaning exists, as Williams says, only when we name it—that is, in the difference.

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8. Walter Jackson Bate, "The English Poet and the Burden of the Past, 1660-1820," p. 245.
9. *Ibid.,* p. 246.
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11. *Ibid.,* p. 263, 264.

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12. *Ibid.*, p. 262.

13. In addition to his essay for this issue of *Dædalus*, see Geoffrey Hartman, "False Themes and Gentle Minds," *Philological Quarterly*, XLVII, 1 (January, 1968), pp. 55-68; "Romantic Poetry and the Genius Loci," in Peter Demetz, Thomas Greene, and Lowry Nelson, Jr., eds., *The Disciplines of Criticism: Essays in Literary Theory, Interpretation, and History Honoring René Wallek on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1968), pp. 289-314; "Blake and the 'Progress of Poesy,'" in Alvin S. Rosenfeld, ed., *William Blake: Essays for S. Foster Damon* (Brown University Press: Providence, Rhode Island, 1969), pp. 57-68.

14. Hartman, "False Themes and Gentle Minds," *op. cit.*, p. 59.

15. *Ibid.*: see also "Blake and the 'Progress of Poesy,'" *passim*, and "Romantic Poetry and the Genius Loci," *op. cit.*, p. 296: "From Milton through Thomson, Gray, Collins, and the Romantics, the idea of a Progress of Poetry from Greece or the Holy Land to Britain is essential."

16. "False Themes," p. 57.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

21. Quoted from an unpublished essay by Hartman.

22. "False Themes," p. 61.

23. See "Romantic Poetry and the Genius Loci," pp. 309ff.

24. William Carlos Williams, *Spring and All* (Contact Publishing Company: Dijon, 1923), p. 61. I am grateful to my colleague, Richard A. Macksey, for making available to me a copy of the rare first, and so far only, edition of *Spring and All*.

25. See Bate, "The English Poet and the Burden of the Past," *op. cit.*, pp. 248, 256.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 262, 263.

27. "False Themes," p. 60.

28. William Carlos Williams, *I Wanted to Write a Poem: The Autobiography of the Works of A Poet*, reported and edited by Edith Heal (Beacon Press: Boston, 1967), p. 36.

29. Williams, *Spring and All*, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8. All further citations from *Spring and All* will be identified by page numbers in parentheses after each quotation.

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30. See Williams, *I Wanted to Write a Poem, op. cit.*, pp. 29, 30.

31. See Paul De Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in Charles S. Singleton, ed., *Interpretation: Theory and Practice* (The Johns Hopkins Press: Baltimore, Maryland, 1969), pp. 173-209, especially pp. 190-91.

32. The phrase is borrowed from Wallace Stevens' "The Comedian as the Letter C."

33. Rimbaud, *Illuminations, ed. cit.*, pp. 17, 19: "Toutes les femmes qui l'avaient connu furent assassinées: quel saccage du jardin de la beauté! . . . Il s'amusa à égorger les bêtes de luxe. Il fit flamber les palais. Il se ruait sur les gens et les taillait en pièces."

34. Rimbaud, "L'oeuvre inouïe," *Illuminations*, p. 40, and see the "lettres du voyant," *passim, ibid.*, pp. xxvi-xxxv.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 19: "La foule, les toits d'or, les belles bêtes existaient encore."

36. *Ibid.*: "La musique savante manque à notre désir."

37. Thus in the text. Possibly this is a misprint for "great," but I have tried to suggest above a possible meaning that would allow it to stand. There are many misprints or downright errors in the text of *Spring and All*, some of which I have silently corrected in my citations. Slashes in my quotations correspond to paragraph breaks in the original.

38. William Carlos Williams, *Paterson* (New Directions: New York, 1963), p. 273.

39. William Carlos Williams, *The Collected Later Poems* (New Directions: New York, 1963), p. 23.

40. See "William Carlos Williams," *Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth-Century Writers* (Belknap Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1965), pp. 285-359 (also available in Atheneum paperback), and the introductory essay to *William Carlos Williams: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Twentieth Century Views (Prentice-Hall, Inc.: Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1966), pp. 1-14. The latter volume also reprints for the first time some of the prose from *Spring and All*.

41. Williams, *Collected Later Poems, op. cit.*, p. 256.

42. Williams, *Paterson, op. cit.*, p. 133.

43. *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry*, trans. Lane Cooper (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, New York, 1947), pp. 9-10.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 68, 74.

45. For my discussion of Aristotle, I am indebted to an unpublished lecture by Jacques Derrida.

46. "La 'différance,'" *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie*, 62e Année, No. 3 (Juillet-Septembre, 1968), p. 96: "Il faut . . . séjourner dans

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la difficulté de ce passage, le répéter dans la lecture rigoureuse de la métaphysique partout où elle normalise le discours occidental et non seulement dans les textes de l'histoire de la philosophie.' "

47. See Jacques Derrida, "La pharmacie de Platon," *Tel Quel,* 32 and 33 (1968), pp. 3-48, 18-59, and Gilles Deleuze, "Platon et le simulacre," *Logique du sens* (Les Editions de Minuit: Paris, 1969), pp. 292-307.

48. See Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx," *Nietzsche* (Les Editions de Minuit: Paris, 1967), pp. 183-92.

49. Deleuze, *Logique de sens, op. cit.,* pp. 89, 90: "le sens n'est jamais principe ou origine, il est produit. Il n'est pas à découvrir, à restaurer ni à reemployer, il est à produire par de nouvelles machineries."

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ROY HARVEY PEARCE

Gesta Humanorum: Notes on the Humanist as Witness

I

I MEAN to suggest by my main title the utopian aspirations of the humanistic studies, concerned with those human deeds so important in their history that they compel us to know them for what they were and continue to be. We would learn to assent to them—at most, as possibly our own deeds, and at least, as deeds done on our behalf. In the process (it is important to emphasize that humanistic study is a process, an act, itself a deed amenable to further humanistic study), we hope to discover and confirm alternate modes of what we take to be authentically human. My subtitle qualifies this utopianism with the individual humanist's acknowledgment of his limitations: His is after all but one perspective, that of the scholar whose special expertise demands that he bear witness to what he has learned.

Whatever the limited perspective of the individual humanist, today he is willing, even eager, to conceive of the scope of humanistic studies as extending beyond the humanities as traditionally set, at least into the social sciences. Indeed, he discovers that the modern anthropologist's definition of culture may well be his own:

> Our ideas, our values, our acts, even our emotions, are, like our nervous system itself, cultural products—products manufactured, indeed, out of tendencies, capacities, and dispositions with which we were born, but manufactured none the less. Chartres is made of stone and glass. But it is not just stone and glass; it is a cathedral, and not only a cathedral, but a particular cathedral built at a particular time by certain members of a particular society. To understand what it means, to perceive it for what it is, you need to know rather more than the generic properties of stone and glass and rather more than what is common to all cathedrals. You need to understand also—and . . . most critically—the specific concepts of the relations between God, man, and architecture that, having governed its creation, it consequently embodies. It is no different with men: they, too, every last one of them, are cultural artifacts.[1]

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Such a definition of culture at the beginning entails such a definition of man at the end, or vice versa. More important, it is based on a conception of a continuing transaction between man and those "objects" of the world, including other men, that constitute his culture. This transaction might well be described as a continuing "subjectivization" of the "objective." The objects of culture were created by human deeds, *gesta humanorum;* their function in man's life can be known precisely only if the humanist, like the anthropologist, studies them as *continuing* deeds. He recovers a sense of their life in the past so as to render a continuing possibility of and for life in the present.

The humanist then has as his concern an overwhelming panoply of activities—the work of artists and artisans, poets and politicians, scientists and sociologists, reporters and reverends—as evidence of their deeds comes to him in documents. His task is to discover which are the most important documents and then to learn to understand and interpret them. He may well confine himself to just one class of documents—paintings, houses, poems, campaign speeches, experiments in molecular biology, editorials, or sermons; or he may interpret such documents and try to see how they are related to one another, how together they are expressive of the achievement of the human spirit. His is an attempt to discover the world as human, so the more fully to humanize himself and his readers, auditors, or viewers.

Here the humanist discovers that his fundamental charge is to bear witness. As an "expert witness," in the legal sense, and not a direct witness of the original deed, he must study the document(s) which that deed brought forth and testify as to origin, meaning, and significance. Beyond the "legal" implication of his calling as witness, there is a "religious" implication, religious if only in the sense that the humanist has a commitment to the idea of man and the life of the human spirit—*humanitas* as an absolute value. He may not like what his studies tell him; he may indeed discover that the document and the deed it projects somehow violate the very idea of man to which he is committed, narrowing rather than extending the possibility of full and authentic selfhood in society. Nonetheless, the scholarship of the humanist is grounded in that rigorous set of disciplines by which he was taught to discover and tell the truth.

An idea central to humanistic studies since the Renaissance compels the humanist to bear witness to *gesta humanorum,* that is, the dignity of man. We may no longer find supportable the claims

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of Pico's fifteenth-century oration on the subject: "O supreme generosity of God the Father, O highest and most marvelous felicity of man! To him it is granted to have whatever he chooses, to be whatever he wills. . . ." We can no longer afford Pico's God-centered aristocratic individualism. Products and producers of culture, we take a somewhat more cautionary and, at the same time, more expansive view and accordingly find that the scope of our interests and concerns has likewise become at once more cautionary and more expansive:

> Men need, as much as they need clothes, a sense of dignity and of purpose; and therefore they need systems which protect and legitimize such a sense, and a language and clusters of concepts which enable them to share that sense with others and to receive from others the reassurance of awareness that the sense is shared and that one is not, as one had feared, naked and alone. . . . There is something affected, and pretentious, in claiming to despise the expression, in great numbers of human beings, of general human needs which the scoffer necessarily shares. . . . One cannot refute the expression of a need, and although one can remove the need itself, there are some needs which can only be removed by death. One such need seems to be the need for dignity.[2]

The humanist's sense of the dignity of man is nonetheless firm for being somewhat muted. Above all, it demands of him that he deepen and enlarge his conception of *gesta humanorum* and thus of the documents which it is his special charge as humanist to discover, perserve, and elucidate. His task now as ever is to design and carry out those principles of elucidation deriving from his deepened and enlarged role as witness.

II

I assume that it is unarguable that the first stage in any humanistic study is that of exegesis—teaching oneself to understand the documents with which one is concerned. This, of course, is "scholarship"—the establishment of a correct text, the mastery of its vocabulary, grammar, and syntax, the identification of the system of conventions of the culture for and in which it was made, and so on. To know how to find and use such data is a necessary condition (as it were, the underside of the iceberg) of understanding and interpretation. "Understanding" I differentiate from "interpretation," because understanding involves the focusing on one document at a time—the attempt to know the document in and of itself. Interpretation—which is my main concern here—consists in moving be-

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yond (but necessarily *via*) understanding to the interrelating of documents (of the same class, of different classes, or of both) in such a way as to know them in their historically definable sociocultural matrix. Here we come to what I shall call the problem of implication.

My perspective is that of a literary humanist, whose concern is to study literary documents such as poems. Poems, modern criticism tells us, are documents so made that we must perforce understand them intrinsically, in and of and for themselves. Indeed, recent linguistic theory has defined poetry as language so used as to call attention to itself.[3] In poetry certain aspects of language (for example, simile and metaphor, metrical effects inherent in the language, and grammaticality itself) are used to exploit the capacity to make fictions: statements not, strictly speaking, subject to the correspondence theory of truth. There is a kind of centripetal movement, whereby linguistic meanings and usages in ordinary discourse are focused, intermeshed, and made into a new self-sustaining whole; and it is toward the elucidating and grasping of this whole that literary critical understanding is directed. The language of a poem exists independently of the poetic context in which it is used, and prior to a literary understanding of the poem, the humanist must master that language in its extra-poetic context: This is "scholarship." The new whole is a special kind of human deed in the knowledge of which—in and of and for itself—we can rest satisfied, if only for a while. Once we know what the poem is ("means" in this order of discourse comes to equal "is"), we want to know what it does. At that point we perforce begin to interpret. We may ask questions of the poem, questions deriving from our situation in history and not from the poem in its own: How does the poem relate to other poems and to other kinds of documents? What light does the poem throw on our systems of belief and commitment, taken either synchronically or diachronically? The only absolute rule is that the interpretation we arrive at cannot violate our antecedent understanding of the poem.

This relationship of literary understanding and interpretation suggests that the same process must obtain for all humanistic understanding and interpretation—for the understanding and interpretation of paintings, houses, campaign speeches, experiments in molecular biology, editorials, and sermons. Together all these documents constitute the particular form of culture that concerns the humanist. The system whereby we understand poems intrinsically

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is called the theory of literature. Accordingly, there must be something analogous to that theory—insofar as humanistic studies are concerned—for these other kinds of documents. Such understanding must be prior to interpretation, of whatever scope. The humanistic understanding of an experiment in molecular biology would not aim at comprehending the place of the experiment in a series of such experiments, leading to increasingly correct knowledge of the problem. Rather, it would aim at comprehending the experiment—through understanding—as an exemplum of *gesta humanorum*, an abidingly powerful and significant instance of man's attempt to discover humanity not only in his world, but in himself. Interpretation would follow and would yield a specifically humanistic history of science.[4] This would also be true, I think, for the humanistic mode of understanding and interpreting other kinds of documents.

III

The documents that humanists study have a certain prestige and privilege. They are "expressive" in the fullest sense. Thus Robert Redfield has pointed out:

> Both humanist and social scientist have access, through the study of materials both different and similar, to the systems of values that distinguish humanity.
>
> To study states of mind, we need expressive documents. Whether we undertake the study of humanity as a student of the arts and of literature or as a social scientist, we find or we make expressive documents. The materials of social science and of the humanities are essentially the same. A tool is expressive in that it shows the purpose of the user and perhaps something of the skill of the maker. Insofar as it is a work of fine art, it shows something still more significant: something of the standards of technical performance and perhaps of aesthetic satisfaction. A personal letter is in many cases more richly expressive than a tool; and a curse, a chance remark, a word said in passion, a folk tale and a novel—these are expressive indeed.[5]

Further, such documents are expressive of man's possibilities for making history, even as it has made him. In the words of Américo Castro:

> History is where are realized, in many ways, man's possibilities for achieving great deeds and works that endure and radiate their values afield, works that effectively quicken and make fruitful in other men the capacity for reasoning and the longing to break out of the common round of daily insignificance, in other words, that can affect the mind, the imagination, or the soul.[6]

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The humanist's task is, of course, to identify such documents, giving them prestige and privilege only when they satisfy the kind of criteria that Redfield and Castro delineate. These documents have an "overplus" of value. They not only serve their primary and initial function, but are expressive and symbolic of the special values of their kind taken as a class. They are quite literally central, having accrued to themselves the aims, aspirations, functions, and even the style of the documentary mode that they express. What is said of one kind of such documents, poems (I mean poems that matter to us), can be said of all: Crucial to their centrality are special languages (or whatever media appropriate) that call attention to themselves. In their origin, perhaps, their special value accrues from the powerful expression of quite pragmatic functions. But, as the humanist sees *ex post facto,* they have *appreciated* in historical fact and have added significantly to man's sense of his world (or part of it) in relation to his sense of himself. Granting them prestige and privilege, we try to understand and then interpret them. We would endeavor to comprehend their principle of expression, a compound of their functioning as forms of discourse (as paintings, houses, poems, campaign speeches, experiments in molecular biology, editorials, or sermons) and as centrally symbolic vehicles for that aspect of human aspiration their forms of discourse represent. We would know documents as deeds—*gesta humanorum.*

IV

I can put my generalizing remarks into proper perspective by considering what for an Americanist like me is one of the principal works of humanistic scholarship of our time, Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth.*[7] Beyond its major contribution to our substantive understanding of its subject, *Virgin Land* is a basic document in the humanistic studies, precisely because the criteria of its inquiry are as various as its materials. The logic of its structure suggests how it articulates in great detail some of the problems of humanistic studies. In looking at the dialectic and not the history of its composition, I am concerned with logical and structural priorities and relationships and with how the book directs us to make up our minds, not with how Professor Smith makes up his mind. Perhaps it is true that *le livre c'est l'homme même,* but in this case I for one am not competent to say so.

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Everywhere in *Virgin Land* one can see how well Professor Smith has learned the lesson of A. O. Lovejoy's history of ideas. That lesson called for rigorously logical dissection as a first stage in the investigation into beliefs and the commitments and acts they entail. Late in his life Lovejoy said that he had come to believe that his work in the history of ideas was intended to make Wilhelm Dilthey possible. He meant by this that he wanted to cut through the foggy mystique of *Geistesgeschichte* to understand the elements which made up a given *Zeitgeist.* Thus, for Lovejoy the first stage was analytical and logical—the thinking through of the logical possibilities latent in any statement of belief or in any idea. His own best known work, of course, carried on this analytical mode, the mode of understanding, and he pursued relentlessly elements of a belief, an idea-complex, or a "philosophy" as they combined and recombined. What he seemed to discover were myriad paradoxes, since men are not necessarily logicians, except perhaps *ex post facto.* In a few essays, he went on to what he called the synthesizing stage of the historiography of ideas (the mode of interpretation): Combinations of unit ideas, however paradoxical or illogical they appeared, were placed in their socio-cultural contexts and were shown as they shaped men's minds and opinions, leading them to act. These very acts led to new combinations of unit-ideas, new complexes, new commitments, and new acts.

I summarize Lovejoy's well-known method in order to point out that it also characterizes Professor Smith's book—latently, as it were. That is, I suspect that this initial analytic stage is not present in *Virgin Land* itself, but is antecedent to the book as Professor Smith wrote it for us. Note, for example, the paradoxically different views of the Western hero and of the West itself which Professor Smith details for us and the care with which he sets forth the strictly ideological elements of the paradox, even as he deals with its expressive elements. Further, the paradox, considered intellectually, is necessarily a logical one. Lovejoy's mode of thinking was the necessary condition of composing the book, even if it is not presented initially by way of a prolegomenon. This is worth pointing out, because it explains why and how Professor Smith has been able to break with the intellectual and cultural historians before him. They took the ideologies related to the West as given and then tried to place them in, derive them from, or relate them to their socio-cultural contexts—or to see them as motivating agents. Indeed, *Virgin Land* is in part the history of histories of the West.

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It might well be that it was from this perspective that Professor Smith began his initial analysis. He concludes with an essay on the paradoxes on which Turner was hoist. I have a sense that, as a historian going to other historians, he makes his argument properly end where it has really begun.

Unhappily, Professor Smith says little about method. There is the teasingly modest statement in the Preface:

> The terms "myth" and "symbol" occur so often in the following pages that the reader deserves some warning about them. I use the words to designate larger or smaller units of the same kind of thing, namely an intellectual construction that fuses concept and emotion into an image. The myths and symbols with which I deal have the further characteristic of being collective representations rather than the work of a single mind. I do not mean to raise the question whether such products of the imagination accurately reflect empirical fact. They exist on a different plane. But as I have tried to show, they sometimes exert a decided influence on practical affairs.[8]

Professor Smith's conception of myth and symbol is made firm —and more important, corrigible—by the necessary condition of Lovejoy's "analytic" method. Moreover, the terms "myth" and "symbol" have, in effect, little to do with the various kinds of mystiques—ranging from non- to anti-historical—associated with their use in much contemporary literary criticism and philosophical anthropology and said to be "collective representations." But I find here none of the Jungian (or pseudo- or quasi-Jungian) dogma of the archetype and its mysteries. Nor, at the other extreme, do I find in Professor Smith's use of the terms "myth" and "symbol" any of the socio-economic reductionism of the sociology of knowledge, pure or vulgar. "Myth" and "symbol" in *Virgin Land* are shown to be collective representations: They embody ideas precisely as those ideas are given shape and direction and are transformed into vital images in the process—the quite empirically conceived historical process—of "living" in the various socio-cultural institutions in which Professor Smith studies them and in the contexts of which he renders them. Their forms follow their function at once as ideas and vehicles for ideas.

Keeping this in mind, I find puzzling one sentence from the Preface: "I do not mean to raise the question whether such products of the imagination accurately reflect empirical fact." Professor Smith has, in fact, continually raised this question—in his demystifying approach to the matter of myth and symbol, in his

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concern to hold to the concept of "intellectual construct," and in his analytic vigor. He means, I think, that he will not act as *judge* of that segment of our past with which he deals, but rather as *witness*. He will let us *see* the paradoxes and how they emerge—how, in their paradoxical quality, they become images, and distort, deny, or falsify empirical fact—and then he will let us do the questioning. For surely we cannot help but ask questions, once we have worked through *Virgin Land*.

In *Virgin Land*, Professor Smith implicates ideas in their socio-cultural contexts, thereby showing how images—myths and symbols—have developed. Our ability to ask valid questions depends on his success in this substantive core of the book. Let me cite a few examples.

In his treatment of the development of the Western hero, Leatherstocking and his personae, Professor Smith studies a highly institutionalized literary personage and the transformations worked on him by the pressures of literary conventions, the psychology of human behavior, the relationship between imagined and actual Westerners, the development of a mass audience, the technology whereby that development was forced, and the economics of publishing. Most important, I think, are the latter factors, involving the development of a mass audience. Professor Smith, in this instance, makes investigations at once qualitative and quantitative. The images developed and the congeries of myth and symbol are depicted as they take on institutional forms. Popular literature is treated in its true form, as the displacement of aesthetic structures by what are, in the end, predominantly or essentially economic structures. At one point by way of summary Professor Smith writes:

> Large-scale production implies regularity of output. The customer must be able to recognize the manufacturer's product by its uniform packaging —hence the various series [of Dime Novels] with their characteristic formats. But a standard label is not enough; the product itself must be uniform and dependable.[9]

At this stage Professor Smith is not discussing art *per se*, even popularized art *per se*, but art entirely implicated in economics. As the synthesizing intellectual and cultural historian must, he has not simply "placed" ideas in their socio-cultural contexts, but has shown how those contexts create a special kind of image, to be understood, finally, as the product of the interaction of ideas and contexts. His word, following the argument of the Preface, would be "fusion." His subject at this point is not ideas, literary images,

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personae, or technology, but rather all of them at once as they are fused into one of the viable elements of the part of American socio-cultural life vitally related to ideas of the West. Ideas are shown—to paraphrase Kenneth Burke—as they have become equipment for living. Through their expression in properly understood and interpreted documents, they are shown to be deeds—*gesta humanorum.*

Finding of the right contexts for ideas, implicating as opposed to placing them in their contexts, and only then treating them as images—this is one of Professor Smith's great gifts, and a major contribution of *Virgin Land* to the technique (or the art) of humanistic studies. In the section entitled "Passage to India," the context is that of imperialist power politics. In the "Garden of the World," it is that of agrarian versus urban economic theorizing, the Free Soil issue, and utopian political theorizing. Without summarizing *Virgin Land,* I would only emphasize the way, in all cases, Professor Smith has taught us how to discover "collective representations"—fusions of concept and emotion—as the viable products of ideas implicated in empirically definable socio-cultural institutions. Further, he has taught us to see that the resulting images carry with them the impression of the institutions involved, and so represent—however paradoxically when considered analytically—historical actuality, *our* historical actuality.

The fact that it is *our* historical actuality inevitably raises the question of the use in particular of *Virgin Land,* and in general of its kind of intellectual history. I return to the statement of the Preface: "I do not mean to raise the question whether such products of the imagination accurately reflect empirical fact." This might be Professor Smith's equivalent of Max Weber's famous reply to a question asking why he wrote the kind of historical sociology he did: "I wish to see how much I can bear." How can we treat sympathetically the follies and mistakes of our forebears, while yet declining to reduce them to a single master cause? How shall we carry out Professor Lovejoy's famous injunction:

> Though the history of ideas is a history of trial-and-error, even the errors illuminate the peculiar nature, the cravings, the endowments, and the limitations of the creature that falls into them, as well as the logic of the problems in reflection upon which they have arisen; and they may further serve to remind us that the ruling modes of thought of our own age, which some among us are prone to regard as clear and coherent and firmly grounded and final, are unlikely to appear in the eyes of posterity to have any of these attributes. The adequate record of even

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the confusions of our forebears may help, not only to clarify these confusions, but to engender a salutary doubt whether we are wholly immune from different but equally great confusions. For though we have more empirical information at our disposal, we have not different or better minds; and it is, after all, the action of the mind upon facts that makes both philosophy and science—and, indeed, largely makes the "facts."[10]

Virgin Land calls for a position somewhat more "activist" than that demanded in *The Great Chain of Being:* The difference between a Lovejoy and a Smith as humanists is not only that between the analyst who would primarily understand and the synthesizer who would primarily interpret, but between the historian under the aegis of Zeus and the historian under the aegis of Prometheus. At one point Professor Smith writes: "These inferences from the myth of the garden will be recognized as the core of what we call isolationism."[11] This is not the statement of the historian who would teach us the lessons of the past or who would have us look down upon our forebears, even if the pure logic of our studies might permit. In context, it is the statement of a historian who conceives of intellectual and cultural history as a way of seizing directly the ideas that, as images in action, have helped form the decisions of our forebears and in part, therefore, those we make today. Such a historical work as *Virgin Land,* then, as it deals with "collective representations" is, in effect, collectively therapeutic. I am, of course, thinking of the psychoanalytic model—particularly of that model associated with ego-psychology: The patient gradually comes to grips with his past in all its paradoxes, confusions, and follies, and learns to accept it, to accept himself, and so perhaps to redirect himself, building his future more intelligently. Only if he accepts his past and knows it genuinely and authentically as his own can he be free. And this is precisely the desired effect of the work of the humanist as witness.

Whereas intellectual history in the analytic sense gives us comprehension, in the synthetic sense (the sense of *Virgin Land*) it gives us insight. Comprehension, of course, in the process of psychoanalytic therapy seems to be a precondition of insight. Comprehension sorts things out and places them; insight puts them together and implicates them in the deep biography that is the history of the patient. A similar process, I think, at the level of "collective representation" is at work in *Virgin Land.* Professor Smith seems in significant part to have anticipated the question raised in 1962 by Erik Erikson:

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The question is whether the historian and psychoanalyst can bridge the gap between psychic reality and historical actuality and discern together, not only whether and why a leader's or a people's opinions and actions seem irrational from a rationalist's point of view, but also what alternatives are most acute in historical actuality; not only what apprehensions seem to endanger, but also what opportunities seem to promise a more inclusive sense of identity and security. For collective as well as individual adaptation is furthered only by the proper ratio of insight offered and of action "sponsored."[12]

Virgin Land is a rational book dealing sympathetically with the irrational. It treats of "alternatives . . . most acute in historical actuality," "apprehensions," and "opportunities," because in their various socio-culturally conditioned forms they were immediately present to those whose alternatives, apprehensions, and opportunities they actually were. The questions required deal with our relationship to these possibilities and their analogues in our time and must be asked in all the variegated forms and structures of the language of those for whom the questions first arose, those who first answered them, however wisely or foolishly. The dialectic of *Virgin Land* lets us see that those answers were originally questions and, further, helps explain how, why, and to what purpose they arose. In the end one does not question the world of *Virgin Land;* one is questioned by it. As the myths and symbols of *Virgin Land*—to use Erikson's terms—have "sponsored" the actions of its protagonists, so they give us insight into them and into ourselves since we can acknowledge them as our forebears and progenitors.

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Virgin Land goes far; the humanist's professional utopianism, however, bids him declare that it could go further. Most of all, a clearer differentiation is needed between the ante-bellum American's sense of his human nature as against Henry Nash Smith's sense of that nature. In *Virgin Land* there is a slight tendency to psychologize after the fact—to interpret a man like Cooper, for example, as being a kind of split personality. He is seen as somehow secretly longing for the primitivistic world of Leatherstocking, when in fact he worked out a scheme whereby he demonstrated to himself (consciously at least) that such a world was lost and gone forever, a price paid for the high world of civilization that had succeeded it. Professor Smith's mode of implication, his deployment of the concepts of myth and symbol, does not sufficiently take into

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account that most vexatious problem of change in concepts of human nature.

This, then, is for humanistic interpretation the abiding problem that modes of implication pose for us. The modes center on synthesizing terms like idea, idea-complex, ideology, structure, genre, theme, icon, metaphor, myth, style, poetics, symbol, national character, and the like. Such terms exist at different levels of abstraction since they more or less include aspects of the expressive documents they enable us to relate to each other as well as to the cultures out of which they come and to our own. Moreover, such terms represent our retrospective interrelating—of expressive (or privileged) documents, of the conscious and deliberate notion of members of the culture, or of both. Such distinctions are not crucial so long as we make the proper discriminations—not imputing a conscious use of a synthesizing term where factually it would be an error. It is crucial that we realize what is entailed in our use of such synthesizing terms and then act on that realization.

These terms are *normative*, precisely because they help us discover a principle of coherence among the documents they enable us to interrelate and because that principle itself derives from a culture's sense of its own coherence. This coherence principle, it seems to me, always involves two elements—a theory of human nature and a theory of society. Functionally, the two constitute a single principle.

Thus the poetics of Aristotle (in his *Poetics* and elsewhere), Sidney, Shelley, Lessing, Croce, and Jakobson set forth what poetry is or should be according to the theorist's sense of the self, society, and their interrelations. These interrelations, whether set forth explicitly or implicitly, must be taken into account if we are to understand a given system of poetics as a factor enabling us to implicate poems in their culture. Moreover, each student of these poems—privileged expressive documents—has his own conception of poetics, tied to his own sense of the self, society, and their interrelations. As interpreter, he seeks to find such congruence as there is among *his* poetics (likely to be that of his culture) and that of Aristotle and others. There will surely be congruence, to the degree that there appear to be "universals" in the self, society, and their interrelations.[13] The fact of congruence makes for the continuity of one expressive document—indeed, of one culture—to another and so permits understanding and interpretation. The fact of congruence, moreover, makes possible our implicating a poem at once in its own

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culture and in ours. The *quality* of implication will differ; comprehending such differences is the essence of humanistic studies. The fact of congruence enables us to recognize and take pleasure in the difference. We will, if skilled enough, learn even to interpret our poetics (and the poems whose qualities it prescribes) in the light of that of another culture, just as at the same time we interpret the poetics (and poems) of another culture in the light of our own. That is to say, the proper use of synthesizing terms like poetics can lead us to the enhancement of the humanist's proper sense of the plenitude of cultures and the possibilities for "authenticity" that their expressive documents demonstrate they offer.

I have instanced here only the case of poetics as a synthesizing term, but a similar case could be made for other terms. My main concern has been to suggest why, how, and to what end such terms are normative. Centrally involved is the need for all humanists to attend more closely to the theories of human nature and society that set the norms which bind such synthesizing terms as well as the expressive documents they synthesize. The normative quality of such terms gives them their distinct worth in humanistic studies, for that quality leads to the study of values, modes of valuation, affects, and *Erlebnis;* studying expressiveness itself leads us to that *critical involvement* which is our professional charge. If through the use of such synthesizing terms we are enabled to implicate expressive documents in their cultures, then perforce we are implicated ourselves—and as writers and teachers, we can implicate others. *Critical involvement* thus yields *judicial implication.* A given poetics is tied to a given theory of human nature and a given theory of society, as are the poems it would enable us to implicate in their culture and ours. And we can judge—we must judge—the degree to which a given theory of human nature and a given theory of society, manifest in the expressive documents as we can implicate them in their culture, enable (or disable) that full and free realization of human potentiality in society which is our abiding concern as humanists. The theory of human nature and society, of course, is at the heart of the idea of the dignity of man.

As humanists we are interested in what man has achieved in the light of what he might have achieved. Thus we construct our critiques of societies and cultures by understanding and interpreting privileged documents as expressive of *gesta humanorum.* The documents project deeds done on behalf of man, although often in spite of man. Within the terms of this inevitable paradox there is played

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out man's aspiration to dignity—which must be, we now see, at once individual and collective. The humanist understands human nature, at once deriving from culture and adding to it, as it achieves its characteristic expressions—in documents central to those expressions, *gesta humanorum*. If we have the means to understand documents and the modes to interpret them—and also a sufficiently open and flexible sense of the nature of the men whose deeds they express and of the possibilities and impossibilities for human dignity—we shall be in that position, at once humbling and ennobling, which Emerson described in his essay, "History":

> We sympathize in the great moments of history, in the great discoveries, the great resistances, the great prosperities of men; because there law was enacted, the sea was searched, the land was found, or the blow was struck, *for us*, as we ourselves in that place would have done or applauded.

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RICHARD HOGGART

Humanistic Studies and Mass Culture

I HAVE been asked to look at two problems: at the relation of the mass media to humanistic studies, and at how the sociology of literature and art might bear on such studies. The focus of my paper is less on theory within the humanities (the general theme of this issue) than on what we might learn from the theoretical work of certain other disciplines. Learning something about procedures in these other disciplines may lead us to become more effectively theoretical ourselves; or it may make us more determinedly concrete.[1]

It seems best to talk not about "the humanities" in general, but about the particular field I know best: literature, literary criticism, and the study and teaching of literature, especially within universities. This can be justified on more than personal grounds, for in these areas we have a great many assumptions and even prejudices, but hardly any agreed theory. I am inclined to argue that we do not need an agreed theory; in this I tend to be on the side of F. R. Leavis in the famous exchange between him and René Wellek. But we should not give our unconsidered assumptions the status of a firm and coherent philosophy. Nor should we sit so comfortably in Zion, sure of the wholeness and rightness of our "subject."

Sometimes I think there is no recognizable discipline of "English," no genuine whole, but only a set of contrived frontiers and selected approaches which, for complicated historical and cultural reasons, have come to be known as "a subject." Thousands are living within this frame of reference; it is part of the self-justifying, self-perpetuating, closed world of "English studies"; and it has its counterparts among the other humanities.

There are, it is true, a few outriders, a few inorganic additions:

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sometimes the History of Ideas, sometimes courses in Literature, Life and Thought, sometimes sixteenth or seventeenth or eighteenth or nineteenth century Background, sometimes even the Sociology of Literature. None of these, however, has effectively prompted a rethinking or redefinition of the subject itself; they have been made to serve it in a subordinate way. They are used within a set of assumptions that do duty for sustained thought about relationships. These assumptions are the more powerful for not being brought to the surface, to the point where they might be challenged. They are assumptions about art and its socio-cultural relationships, about culture in general (especially about mass culture and mass art), about audiences and levels and elites and minorities and masses, and about the effects—good and bad—of literature and the arts. Too many people in schools of literature, and indeed in the humanities in general, work from such fixed patterns of socio-cultural assumptions, patterns almost wholly decided by their cultural conditioning and imitative role-playing. Apart from the inadequacy of this outlook, when we make social judgments outside literature or when we comment on mass art, it limits our reading of those documents of high culture whose proponents we claim to be.

The study of mass communications and mass arts leads to more general questions about mass culture, and thus to the social sciences, where theoretically-guided work on mass society has been done. One begins to move into what are sometimes called the human or cultural sciences. It was from here that I began to believe that English studies have to be redefined.

What challenges to our common assumptions are caused by a study of mass culture? First, a close look at the mass media and at other elements in mass culture not only helps broaden our understanding of mass society, but affects our views on traditional culture as well. Mass art proves to be complex, both in itself and in its relations to its audiences, and its cultural meanings, therefore, cannot be easily inferred. It cannot be adequately assessed by the usual dualisms and dichotomies (though some of them are useful if handled carefully): machine-tooled versus spontaneous, brutal versus genteel, low versus high, processed versus live, evasive versus honest, conventional versus challenging, falsely-resolving versus truly-exploring, symptomatic versus representative, and exploitative versus disinterested. From this investigation one may also learn something about "high art," as it is conventionally classified: that, for example, its "complexity" is sometimes only an

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appearance, only an ability to operate within the intellectual and artistic fashions of its day.

Second, work in the mass media can make our approach to traditional art forms more flexible.[2] It becomes harder for us to assume that the big three—plays for the theater, the novel, and poetry—are a natural and sufficient triumvirate. Our difficulties here have sometimes been comical. I am thinking, for example, of the original unwillingness of British dramatists to write for television except on their own terms—theater terms; and of the eventual emergence of an impressive body of playwrights, writing specifically for television, who thought in terms of that medium, its possibilities and its relationships. Other difficulties have grown out of various intellectual encounters with film—from accepting only the "art film," to admiring genre for its own sake (as in Westerns), to enthusiastic slumming (as for "bad" 1930's "B" films), to *auteur* theory, or to applied structuralism. In addition, there is that accepted wisdom about the radio feature as "an art form" which makes people in Britain repeat the same three or four names in every discussion, beginning with Dylan Thomas' *Under Milk Wood* and Louis MacNeice's *The Dark Tower.* It is all a considerable muddle.

As long as we learn to respond to their particular characteristics and qualities, the new media can sharpen our sense of the possibilities and the limits of traditional forms. One result of this double process will probably be that traditional forms will become more fluid and multi-dimensional, as we can already see in some theatrical work.

Third, from looking at mass culture we can learn something about audiences. We can learn, above all, that responses may be more various and capacities greater than our simplified models suggest. To judge mass art intentionally, to see it as wholly and effectively exploitative, is not good enough. The mass media may alert us to the danger of such oversimplifications. Although they may indicate and underline our confusion, they cannot in themselves reduce it. One of our common clichés runs like this: Sentimental art is for sentimental people and reinforces their sentimentality, thus making them even cruder emotionally than they were before. But we know very little about what we do as individuals—whether we are intellectuals or not—with the emotions we experience from the arts, high, middle, or low. Perhaps some kinds of "bad" art can inspire "good" feelings, and vice versa.

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The important distinctions here may be between the effectively phony and manipulative and other kinds of unsophisticated art. These questions in particular need a lot more attention than they have had so far.

Similarly, the size and composition of the audiences for a few British television programs (some satirical, some comical, but none of them officially classified as "cultural") bring into question many of our assumptions about the relations between "sophisticated" responses and level of education (let alone level of social class). None of these discoveries need make us stop being critical of many, and probably of most, features of mass culture. They will sharpen that criticism; and they will also make us less likely to react from a highbrow disdain to its mirror image: mass-culture-slumming for fun.

Fourth, a closer look at some parts of mass culture, especially at parts of what is known as "pop culture" or of teenage culture (the two overlap to some extent), may occasionally reveal an unsuspected energy, an implicit criticism of the terms of mass society and of mass culture, a thrust back from the grass roots, and a kind of imaginative inventiveness that nothing in our assumptions gave us reason to expect. To recognize such things is to begin to understand better both the pressures of mass society as a whole and possible resistances to it.

From here it is only a short step, but one more of us will have to take, toward trying to understand by this kind of inward experience other expressive phenomena of mass society which do not belong to even our newly-widened categories of artistic forms, such as changes in styles of dress or of public speech or of gesture. We know about language as gesture; this is gesture as language. Of course we do not have to go so far as this. Those who feel drawn in this direction, however, will not break the line of inquiry, but will continue it naturally.

All this undoubtedly worries some people. Life is too short, they will say, to spend much time on any but the best work. Surely, to go along this route is to risk having all our standards dissolve in a mush of relativity, a fashionable selling-out of all intellectual standards. Surely, not even the most upright of us can avoid being tainted; who would be bold enough to claim that strength?

> We have seen
> Good men made evil wrangling with the evil,
> Straight minds grown crooked fighting crooked minds.[3]

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The study of mass culture need not weaken our distinctions and standards; it may give them a stronger hold, although it may certainly reduce our pride. The closer study of mass society may make us have sad hearts at the supermarket, but at the same time it may produce an enhanced and tempered sense of humanity and humility, instead of the sense of superiority and separateness that our traditional training is likely to have encouraged. Since we are continuing a characteristic feature of the best social criticism of English writers, we are led to ask insistent questions about the quality of life our society offers, questions about its imaginative range and truth. It is tempting and sometimes justifiable (especially since we tend to use it sloppily) to laugh at that phrase "quality of life." But I am more and more disposed to keep it, to ask of all the arts and styles of a society what qualities of life rather than levels of brow they express. This is neither a new nor an *outré* idea. You will remember Eliot's essay on Marie Lloyd in 1923 or his *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* in 1948:

> The reader must remind himself as the author has constantly to do, of how much is here embraced by the term *culture*. It includes all the characteristic activities and interests of a people: Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the 12th August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart board, Wensleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, nineteenth-century Gothic churches and the music of Elgar. The reader can make his own list.

If, working within mass culture, we then turn back to "good art" as it is traditionally defined, we can bring an increased sense of the relations between art and integrity—the search for self-knowledge, the self-forgetful contemplation of experience and dimensions outside ourselves and our society—as well as of a heightened awareness of the relations between art and culture. Without this kind of immersion and this acquaintance with the details of mass culture and art, we cannot speak properly even about the relations between high art and contemporary culture because we have falsified the context. Of course, we do not have to speak about these relations; we can stay within the world of English studies in themselves. But most of us, while claiming to do no more than that, also make unsubstantiated forays into cultural criticism, not necessarily casually, but in the course of our teaching. We should at least try to be consistent.[4]

In the study of mass arts, there is need for more connections than have commonly been made between humanistic disciplines

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as traditionally defined and the "human studies" within the social sciences.[5] I have in mind, for example, the impressively theoretical European tradition in the study of "culture and society" during the nineteenth century, as well as large parts of American social-scientific work in this century.[6] Think of the relevance to a student of literature of studies in anomie and alienation (especially since this work has counterparts and challenges within the cultural criticism made by the literary tradition). Or think of possible relationships and conflicts between such concepts as "*verstehen*," "empathic understanding," and "participant observation" in sociology and the "creative imagination," "impersonality," and "negative capability" in literary criticism. There is a rich and provocative field to be explored in the interplay between ideas on character, relationships, setting, and the nature of the dramatic within literary criticism and sociological literature on symbolic interaction, role-playing, and the definition of the situation.

On a more practical level, there are the differences between sociological content-analysis and close critical reading, each side tending to undervalue the other. Both can be subtle and sometimes they seem close to each other, but the differences in general approach are crucial. In addition, the argument about effects has a substantial literature in the social sciences and about effects literary people for centuries have spoken with assurance. These are only a few obvious areas in which literary criticism and sociology can be usefully studied together.

There are, it is plain, opportunities for making more connections between literary work on myth and symbol and work in areas of anthropology, particularly structural anthropology. Structural analysis of this kind (for example, Lévi-Strauss on myths) also suggests useful work in the study of mass art or older forms of conventional art, since in such productions one is more likely to find common patterns of signs or agreed codes than in individual imaginative explorations.[7] From this point, one is led to more recent developments in structuralism and semiology.[8]

All these are perfectly reasonable aspects of the study of literature, more fully conceived than it is at present. There are also, of course, the traditional humanistic subjects, and with these, too, our links need developing. There are more crucial and relevant ways of starting to make connections than we usually assume. Thus, with history, one can focus directly on these two related questions: the exact ways in which good literature may be "evidence" for the

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historian, and the need for a close, full, "literary-critical" reading by the historian of many of the documents (not just accepted literary documents) he uses.

Two issues—or clusters of issues—seem to be especially interesting among those which arise if one tries to work in the borderland between literature and the social sciences. They both concern "values," although, strictly speaking, that word is being used differently in each case.

The first has to do with the claims we make for a good writer. We praise his capacity for "representative selection," his grasp of "significant detail," the "revealing moment," and the "epiphany" in many phrases that are common currency in literary criticism. And we say that although "low art" is only "symptomatic"—like boils on the body cultural—"high art" is "representative," sees further, and is more "true." It reveals its truth precisely by obeying the internal rules of its kind of art, not by being a set of explanatory statements. But these claims are harder to substantiate than we seem to think and are not made any more true by mere reassertion.[9]

Actually, I doubt that they can ever be proved; I doubt whether they are that kind of knowledge. But they can be teased out further than they usually are to the benefit of all concerned. If the status of this kind of intuition were examined more fully by literary critics, then what they said might not only bear out literary claims; such study might also bear on the social sciences, in which area also creative power is seen as mysterious, and the language generally used to discuss procedures and processes (say, in making hypotheses) sounds remarkably like that used by literary critics to describe creativity in the arts.

The second cluster of problems is that whole area concerned with how we analyze the "values" of a culture, whether through its expressive arts or through any other activity. Most literary people assume that the literature of a society is engaged with its patterns of values (dominant or otherwise), which can be interpreted fairly easily. But these are very difficult matters, and we can learn a lot about them from the argument about values and value-interpretation going on within the social sciences (as well as from that more obviously relevant general area, the sociology of knowledge). In both literary and social scientific studies, there are people who deeply distrust discussion of values. Since the debate is not alive in their field, students of literature tend to become distrustful formalists of one sort or another. The social scientists are often ready

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to argue, and they argue powerfully. I do not myself, it hardly needs saying, share their views; but I do not think we should dismiss them with remarks about unimaginative reductionists. In *The Human Sciences and Philosophy,* Lucien Goldmann correctly relates attitudes like these to the a-philosophical and a-historical drift in some contemporary social sciences. At one point Lévi-Strauss draws his fire and inspires his neatest formulation. I quote it because of its precision and relevance to the general discussion of the social sciences rather than for any judgment on the work of Lévi-Strauss. Goldmann speaks of a "formalistic system that tends to eliminate in a radical way all interest in history and the problem of meaning." Even here, many different kinds of people might hold what at first glance look like similar views. The people themselves, however, range from those who adjust fairly easily to the dominant rationality of their day to those of great integrity and intelligence who challenge our value judgments and the criteria on which they are based as, in the end, relative, culturally conditioned, and impressionistic. If we refer to "the common reader" or "the common pursuit of true judgment," they ask why the codes of a particular Western European society at a particular point of time should be given absolute validity. They invite us to justify the claim that a "good writer" informs us about society, is in some way in touch with "truth," against the view that he is simply an interesting and engaging storyteller. In short, the debate over values among social scientists can challenge the humanist to clarify some of his vague assumptions, especially in areas concerned with the moral meanings, moral insights, and moral functions of art.

In this perspective our usual literary studies seem claustrophobic. But what is the likely outcome of extensions of the kind I have described? We may come to a clearer understanding of the nature and power of literature itself; above all, of the ways the study of literature can help us know a culture. Literary-critical reading may be ingrown; but it is also highly developed and more subtle than most social scientists realize. An emphasis must now be placed on skill in cultural reading—for the sake both of literature and of the human studies within the social sciences. The close reading of forms of mass art may seem too elaborate a process to be worth the effort. The sociologist might offer, instead, the useful alternative of asking people what mass amusements mean to them. This suggestion, however, does not provide an adequate substitute for experiencing things in themselves, since we cannot know what we

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respond to until we have explored both the objects and our responses to them. For example, effects-analysis could be more sharply focused if inquirers began with a well-developed sense of the "thing—the program, the film, the story—in itself."

Although these are comparatively minor practicalities, there is a larger case for the humanities here. The value of literary studies to the social scientist—whether the student of mass communications, of more traditional art forms, or of culture as a whole—lies in the ability to make his models or assumptions more adequate to the full human implications of his subject. In an examination of communication in the arts, literary-cultural studies can direct the social scientist away from various instrumental approaches to more expressive ways; from the conception of the artist as propagandist or message-maker, consciously manipulating artistic expression to evoke a particular response, to an appreciation of more oblique approaches—of symbolism and myth, of art as gratuitous play, celebration, or contemplation, and of art for art's sake, "being" in itself rather than existing as a channel to some other event or end. In the attempt to understand the cultural significance of any work of art, for the humanist a full reading, in and for itself, is the equivalent of participant observation to the sociologist. But one remembers that there is disagreement within the social sciences about the justifications for participant observation.

Literature at all levels has the unique capacity to increase our understanding of a culture. It may create or expand our awareness of a whole order of existence—what another life was like, how individuals faced experience within a dominant frame, what "truth" appeared to be for a different society, or what it felt like to strain against this pattern. By making us know what love and hate and freedom and tyranny feel like, literature helps define or redefine the meanings of those words in other times. It can also reveal what the major tensions, overt or hidden, seem to have been and what they felt like on the pulses. The arts can penetrate what it is becoming fashionable to call the deep structures of society, the underlying play of tensions and assurances, of stresses and releases. This is also true of art that is determinedly antisocial, against its own society or any assumed orders. For all its loosenesses and lack of analytical rigor, the English tradition in literary-cultural criticism has always been concerned with making a deeply human critique. It has kept a firm focus on individuals, on what happens to people. This tradition can best inform our cultural reading of any of the arts, "high"

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or "mass." Here, literary-cultural reading need not just stand at the side of the social sciences. It can challenge them and seek to modify their vision—but only if we approach the arts for themselves, not as sardine tins to be opened for their insights into culture; only if we approach them as things in their own right, not as message-bearers or information-carriers. This brings us to the most important and difficult aspect of all, that of the "autonomy" of art.

I do not believe such an "autonomy" exists, except as a way of speaking that directs our attention to an important truth. I do not believe there is such a thing as art "in itself." Nor do I believe that art is socially determined, because it cannot be adequately explained in social or cultural terms, even though it is culturally conditioned. Unless one accepts and responds to art as a form of free artifice, one will not enjoy it or appreciate it or understand either its individual psychological meanings or its cultural and social significances. The medium is the message, and only in that sense can one speak of a "message." Form is part of content, and content is defined by form. The choice of available forms is conditioned—not entirely, but for most practical purposes—by the culture. Yet, although one responds to these forms as if in and for themselves, this is not to say that they are "autonomous." Nor is it to say that one can find their origins in some social need or ritual. Those origins may lie deeply in some basic movement of the psyche or in some metaphysical condition, independent of all cultural influences. The pursuit of these questions is not relevant to this particular paper. But to raise them is relevant, since they may help define the limits of even the fullest cultural reading.

In this discussion, we have come full circle to a nice paradox. Students of the humanities, especially literary people, are commonly accused of being too concrete, too wedded to the particular, and are told they must grapple more with theory. I agree that we ought to engage more in theoretical questioning; if we do, we will and should alter the definitions and boundaries of our subjects. But the paradox is this: At the far end of that encounter with theory, we again seem to reach a confirmed sense of the importance, the overriding importance, of concreteness. To quote a social scientist, J. D. Douglas: "We must work from the clearly observable, concrete phenomena upward to abstractions about meanings in any culture."[10] The expressive arts should be approached as concrete phenomena, as concrete as social habits, rituals, or gestures, but with even more subtlety, since they are richer, more complex, and

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in touch with more dimensions of our being than are most overt social "facts."

We must start with "the thing in itself," and only from there can we begin our investigations. We may and should go on to genre-reading and to all kinds of wider relations between approaches. In practice we may be doing several different kinds of things at roughly the same time—reading for Tone, reading for Value, and reading for Meaning. But we will not get far unless we start with close literary-cultural reading, one we can apply to all the expressive arts, not just literature, and at all levels.

We read "for values" or "for meanings" not to judge the "literary value" of the work, but to understand better the values assumed within it, against which it braces itself, or to which it reacts. Talcott Parsons once described values as "elements of a shared symbolic system serving as a criterion or standard of selection." For the purposes of "reading for values," this definition must be widened to include reactions against or positions ignoring such shared values. Literary-cultural reading responds first to the language and the form, rather than to the message or substance. Language is one way to seize a particular kind of reality; language and forms are patterns of rhetoric before experience. Less widely, the tone of voice is the most obvious carrier of cultural meanings. The way of talking to people—in *this* society at *this* time—reveals a great deal about a culture. Similarly, character, scene, dramatic moments, pauses, silences, images, stresses or lacks of stress, and the relationships we assume or would never think of assuming (omissions being just as important as commissions)—all these can tell us something about frames of assumptions, about the assumed orders that underpin a work. These may change under stress, but the work may be a part of that change.

Finally, we come full circle in yet another sense. We originally moved from the traditional humanistic concern with the high arts into the dangerously chaotic world of mass culture. Now we come back to reassert the power and overriding importance of the high arts for the student of culture. In fact, engagements with mass culture and with social-scientific theory can strengthen the high claims made for high art—but not easily or quickly. We usually make our high claims too quickly and easily, but the engagement with mass culture and with social-scientific analysis purges them before it reinforces them.

Explorations like these can strengthen our belief (they do not

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"prove" it) that by working skillfully, inventively, and "disinterestedly" within his medium, an artist can arrive at representative selection, significant order, crucial insights, and revelations, whether in particular local detail or in more extensive movements. Such an artist is, above all, true to the twin demands to look at life and to serve art. In addition, he is more likely than other artists to challenge the dominant culture (since all cultures in the end will cut moral corners to keep their orders steady). In these senses the engagements I have described can support the claim we now too often make as a matter of unexamined habit: that good literature contains, represents, or crystallizes "the maximum possibilities of consciousness at its time," and that that is its truth.

In returning to the claims made for literature as a way of exploring values, we come back with renewed force to all the old, rather stale, but moving phrases, to all the enormous, splendid, but not sufficiently scrutinized assertions: about literature as a criticism of life, about its reverence for life, and about the way it may enlarge our sympathies and redirect the flow of our sympathetic consciousness. We come back to our claim that literature is uniquely concerned with the total human response, with "the quality of life," in the fullest senses we are able to imagine.

Appendix

It might be useful to add illustrations of cultural reading. A short essay on reading D. H. Lawrence (A) makes, more fully than in this paper, the first points about reading for tone—responding to the main elements in a work of literature so as to understand more sharply its possible cultural significance. Then (B) and (C) are contrasting pieces used at the Centre for early practice in close and small-scale cultural reading. Included are a few pages of commentary (C) on the comparison. (These appear in a collection of essays published this January.)

(A) *The Voices of Lawrence*

True, there was ripening corn, but this was all of a colour with the dust-yellow, bone-bare island. Malta is all a pale, softish, yellowish rock, just like a bathbrick: this goes into fathomless dust. And the island is stark as a corpse, no trees, no bushes even: a fearful landscape, cultivated and weary with ages of weariness, and old weary houses here and there.

And in spite of all antagonism, I put forth this novel as an honest, healthy book, necessary for us today. The words that shock so much at first don't shock at all after a while. Is this because the mind is depraved

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by habit? Not a bit. It is that the words merely shocked the eye, they never shocked the mind at all. People without minds may go on being shocked, but they don't matter. People with minds realise that they aren't shocked, and never really were: and they experience a sense of relief.

In those two passages, both from essays in *Phoenix II*, we can see Lawrence's discursive style at its best: direct, relaxed and idiomatic, rhetorically repetitive, and doggedly argumentative. As a contrast, listen to the way this passage flirts uneasily with Bloomsbury or flapper's mannerisms:

It is such a bore that nearly all great novelists have a didactic purpose, otherwise a philosophy, directly opposite to their passional inspiration. In their passional inspiration, they are all phallic worshippers. From Balzac to Hardy, it is so. Nay, from Apuleius to E. M. Forster. Yet all of them, when it comes to their philosophy, or what they think-they-are, they are all crucified Jesuses. What a bore! And what a burden for the novel to carry!

Nothing tells more, more immediately or subtly, about a writer than his tone of voice. But analysis of tone is tricky, even in contemporary work (it is even harder if you go back in time). One must keep three main elements constantly in mind and remember that they are interconnected, while still trying to reach the point at which one can say with reasonable confidence that such and such a quality belongs chiefly to element A, B, or C. "Tone of voice" is partly what I. A. Richards meant by "attitude to the reader," partly a branch of what others call "stylistics"; but it is not exactly either. It means the voice of a certain man in a certain time and place, speaking to certain kinds of readers.

The three intertwined elements are the aesthetic, the psychological, and the cultural. The first points to the fact that some tones of voice are determined by artistic considerations, by the needs of a work of art as a formal structure. No tone of voice, however, is wholly decided by internal needs. The tones available for artistic purposes are not limitless at any one time and so vary from period to period, under cultural pressures.

The second element—the psychological—points to the fact that most authors have a recognizable personal tone, something which seems to be influenced by the basic dispositions of their personalities. Graham Greene's recognizable range of tone is partly formed by artistic considerations: To some extent that kind of novel prompts and needs those kinds of tone. In addition, there are cultural explanations for many of the characteristics: exploring these

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sorts of issues in this kind of society to these kinds of assumed readers means that some tones are ruled out while others emerge. Try fitting a paragraph from Graham Greene into a novel by Thackeray or George Eliot, or vice versa. I suspect, however, that the most important determinant of Greene's tone is his own psychological make-up; his kind of mind expresses its attitudes before experience in this stylistic movement, these types of metaphor, these dying falls. The whole rhetoric is, after a while, as recognizable as the habitual physical gestures of an acquaintance.

The third element interests me most just now—that is, the extent to which the tones of writers in any period are formed or qualified by their backgrounds, their sense of shared assumptions with readers, the temper of their class, and so on. One can read "tone of voice" very usefully for its cultural meanings as long as one is able to separate culturally-significant tone from the other two elements and as long as one is equipped to hear. (I cannot hear Shaw in a cultural way. I can guess at certain psychological qualities behind his tones of voice, although I doubt whether I could separate them from certain Irish personae.)

On the other hand, we are all particularly responsive to certain authors whose tones of voice carry psychological or cultural tensions close to our own; they attract us, or affront us, or combine both at once. To me, the two British writers of the last fifty years who are most interesting in this way are Lawrence and Orwell. Each had an unusually well-marked range of tones, a personality on the page. In each, the life and the writing are inseparable; each went on a sort of journey and plotted it in print all the way. No study of either will get very far unless it treats them as whole entities—as novelists, as discursive writers, and as human beings on a certain kind of search. Throughout their wanderings, each was in some important respects ineradicably English: skeptical, nonconforming, intransigent, puritan, and intensely "moral." Each had a love-hate "family feeling" about England.

Both Orwell and Lawrence hammered out a personal tone of voice, drained of "literary" or social-class overtones, and at their best those voices brought important new notes into English discursive prose. The best brief introductions to these tones are, respectively, Orwell's *A Hanging* and the first half of Lawrence's *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine*. Lawrence found his strongest style in a more wasteful way than Orwell, writing an extensive amount so as to get through to the "real marble" now and then. His

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tones, therefore, strong and weak, tend to be all mixed up. *Phoenix II* contains work ranging from 1907 to 1929, just before Lawrence's death, and showing this range of voices clearly. Although there is some chronological development—Lawrence used his truer tones of voice more consistently in the Twenties—he was, nevertheless, capable of reverting to all kinds of odd and uncertain tones almost until his death. He persisted in using many self-conscious, stylistic tricks; he could be arch, coy, or fanciful. Of course, interesting cultural questions could be asked: about why he felt he *had* to use these tones of voice, or why he tried these *particular* authors' voices in some of his fiction. At this distance, especially with the hindsight of knowing what his voice sounds like at its best, it is surprising to discover that he still used pirouettes and was apparently satisfied with them. This only shows, however, how deeply rooted and complex is the business of arriving at one's own style.

In *Phoenix II* (and perhaps in all his discursive work) the finest example of Lawrence's true voice speaking at length is in the Introduction to *Memoirs of the Foreign Legion* by Maurice Magnus. It underlines that "tone of voice" is not some disembodied matter of style, but an effort after honesty—the effort to make all available tones body out an author's distinctive way of seeing the world and to make new or forgotten tones available. Lawrence's successful passages usually (though not always) reinforce the argument that most writers are more confident when their eyes are focused closely and unsentimentally on an object or person. This is the first description of Maurice Magnus:

> He looked a man of about forty, spruce and youngish in his deportment, very pink-faced, and very clean, very natty, very alert, like a sparrow painted to resemble a tom-tit. He was just the kind of man I had never met: little smart man of the shabby world, very much on the spot, don't you know.

There is only one worrying bit in that paragraph, the final "don't you know." One could, of course, argue that the trivial language of the *soi-distant* sophisticated world Magnus liked to inhabit is used ironically. Although the passage might have been stronger without that easy sarkiness, it is marvellously observed and *spoken*, with the quick, alert breath of a certain kind of Englishman from a certain class at a certain time. It could not have been written by, say, E. M. Forster or Angus Wilson or Virginia Woolf. This is not to criticize any of them. It is to say that only certain ranges of tone are available to any one of us, and that to a considerable extent these tones

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are culturally decided; part of a writer's job is to develop the tones available to him for his own best creative purposes.

Both Lawrence and Orwell keep their distance from their readers, Lawrence more than Orwell. Orwell shows himself more vulnerably, and we are inclined to feel warmer toward him. Lawrence, as the admirable frankness of the Maurice Magnus shows, was exceptionally honest about himself; yet he had composed his face and taken control *before* he went into print. In the end he seems less accessible, writing more than anything else about how *he* "came through" and less about others—so that even the searching character sketch of Magnus has an external quality.

When Lawrence's writing is not assured, it often acquires, by a startling irony, the voice of the nagging, shrill, lower-middle, or respectable working-class. It hectors and moralizes and asks self-righteously rhetorical questions so that one wonders whether it is the voice of his mother. Whatever Lawrence may have believed and said against genteel, respectable inhibitions, the restricting emotional habits of his class bit deep. At their best, his voices do not nag or hector or go arty or arch. He looks closely, sees what counts and says so flexibly and idiomatically, as in the description of Magnus quoted above, or almost throughout the essay "Return to Bestwood." He is most effective when his "prophetic" note—so often inflated—is disciplined but not stifled by a particular, exact, and powerful demand on his emotional integrity. Then the voice remains colloquial, but is wholly without casualness; it confronts the most intense experience directly and firmly; for example, as at that moment when Lawrence hears that Magnus, after all his evasions, has killed himself:

> When I had read this letter the world seemed to stand still for me. I knew that in my own soul I had said, "Yes, he must die if he cannot find his own way." But for all that, now I *realized* what it must have meant to be the hunted, desperate man: everything seemed to stand still. I could, by giving half my money, have saved his life. I had chosen not to save his life. Now, after a year has gone by, I keep to my choice. I still would not save his life. I respect him for dying when he was cornered. And for this reason I feel still connected with him.

(B) I present here two moments of vocation—and two contrasting tones:

(1) George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (1872)

> The page of the Cyclopaedia he chanced to open was under the head of Anatomy, and the first passage that drew his eyes was on the

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valves of the heart. He was not much acquainted with valves of any sort, but he knew that valva were folding-doors, and through this crevice came a sudden light startling him, with his first vivid notion of finely-adjusted mechanism in the human frame. A liberal education had of course left him free to read the indecent passages in the school classics, but beyond a general sense of secrecy and obscenity in connection with his internal structure, had left his imagination quite unbiased, so that for anything he knew his brain lay in small bags at his temples, and he had no more thought of representing to himself how his blood circulated than how paper served instead of gold. But the moment of vocation had come, and before he got down from his chair, the world was made new to him by a presentiment of endless processes filling the vast spaces planked out of his sight by that wordy ignorance which he had supposed to be knowledge. From that hour Lydgate felt the growth of an intellectual passion.

(2) Graham Greene, *The Power and the Glory* (1940)

"Oh, it will be hours yet," Mr. Tench assured him again. "Hours? Are you certain? It's very hot in the sun." "You'd better come home."

Home: it was a phrase one used to mean four walls behind which one slept. There had never been a home. They moved across the little burnt plaza where the dead general grew green in the damp and the gaseosa stalls stood under the palms. Home lay like a picture postcard on a pile of other postcards: shuffle the pack and you had Nottingham, a Metroland birthplace, an interlude in Southend. Mr. Tench's father had been a dentist too—his first memory was finding a discarded cast in a waste-paper basket—the rough toothless gaping mouth of clay, like something dug up in Dorset—Neanderthal or Pithecanthropus. It had been his favorite toy: they tried to tempt him with Meccano, but fate had struck. There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in. The hot wet river-port and the vultures lay in the waste-paper basket, and he picked them out. We should be thankful we cannot see the horrors and degradations lying around our childhood, in cupboards and bookshelves, everywhere.

(C) These passages are much nearer in time to each other than were the first two. It is worth exploring the extent to which their differences of tone can be related to differences of social class in the authors and perhaps in the assumed audiences.

(1) D. H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers* (1913)

"The Bottoms" succeeded to "Hell Row." Hell Row was a block of thatched, bulging cottages that stood by the brookside on Greenhill Lane. There lived the colliers who worked in the little gin-pits two fields away. The brook ran under the alder-trees, scarcely soiled by these small mines, whose coal was drawn to the surface by donkeys that plodded wearily in a circle round a gin. And all over the countryside were these same pits, some of which had been worked in the time of Charles II, the

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few colliers and the donkeys burrowing down like ants into the earth, making queer mounds and little black places among the corn-fields and the meadows. And the cottages of these coal-miners, in blocks and pairs here and there, together with odd farms and homes of the stockingers, straying over the parish, formed the village of Bestwood.

(2) E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (1924)

Except for the Marabar Caves—and they are twenty miles off—the city of Chandrapore presents nothing extraordinary. Edged rather than washed by the river Ganges, it trails for a couple of miles along the bank, scarcely distinguishable from the rubbish it deposits so freely. There are no bathing-steps on the river front, as the Ganges happens not to be holy here; indeed there is no river front, and bazaars shut out the wide and shifting panorama of the stream. The streets are mean, the temples ineffective, and though a few fine houses exist they are hidden away in gardens or down alleys whose filth deters all but the invited guest. Chandrapore was never large or beautiful, but two hundred years ago it lay on the road between Upper India, then imperial, and the sea, and the fine houses date from that period. The zest for decoration stopped in the eighteenth century, nor was it ever democratic. There is no painting and scarcely any carving in the bazaars. The very wood seems made of mud, the inhabitants of mud moving. So abased, so monotonous is everything that meets the eye, that when the Ganges comes down it might be expected to wash the excrescence back into the soil. Houses do fall, people are drowned and left rotting, but the general outline of the town persists, swelling here, shrinking there, like some low but indestructible form of life.

To start with the Forster opening, that is plainly an establishing paragraph; it creates the setting of the novel. It also begins to establish the tones within which the novel will be conducted. The voice is of a civilized, literate, English middle-class observer of the early twentieth century. There is, for example, the refusal to say directly that the city of Chandrapore is dull. Instead, the city "presents nothing extraordinary"—a nice example of the understatement typical of a particular English social group at a particular time. There is what I think of as a characteristic Cambridge precision in the next sentence, beginning with the subordinate clause about the river—it is "Edged rather than washed by the river Ganges . . ."—and continuing with quiet irony to describe it as "scarcely distinguishable from the rubbish." More overt irony follows immediately after, when we are told that the river "*happens* not to be holy here." The author is having an outsider's laugh—though a gentle one—at the fact that so many natural objects in India have been given religious meanings. Then Forster gets into his full stride, placing

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each adjective with the sureness of a man who knows exactly the overtones that his milieu can allow. "The streets are mean," he says, "the temples ineffective." "Mean" is a well-bred visitor's judgment; the proportion of the streets are skimped, and so they are not aesthetically satisfying. But to call the temples "ineffective" is even more aesthetic. In what sense are they "ineffective?" Not as temples, surely, not for their religious purposes. Instead, they are "ineffective" to the European visitor who sees them from the outside (since their religion is not his religion), but who nevertheless recognizes beauty when he sees it; to him they *present themselves* inadequately.

Best of all is the latter half of this same sentence, where Forster tells us that "though a few fine houses exist they are hidden away," and only the "invited guest" is likely to penetrate so far as to see them. To call them "fine houses" does not simply mean that they are handsome. "A fine house" also suggests a house in which "fine living" may be presumed to take place; it carries the style of a class, a class of people who would be likely to have "invited guests." One recalls the "civilized" English middle classes at the turn of the century, living in their fine country houses or town houses and having "invited guests" at weekends for good conversation and agreeable pastimes. "The zest for decoration," Forster goes on, "stopped in the eighteenth century, nor was it ever democratic." A world of meaning lies in the slightly amused irony of "zest," a dry intelligence about the relations between Indian society and its art in that "democratic."

So one comes to the final sentence, with its repetitive, ruminative clauses, its quiet rhetoric, and its air of being meant to be read, to be savored reflectively rather than spoken: "Houses do fall, people are drowned and left rotting, but the general outline of the town persists, swelling here, shrinking there, like some low but indestructible form of life." This is an extremely assured passage, sure of its own stance before the material, sure of the responses it will draw from its audience. It is undramatic; the movement of its feelings, the way it approaches the experience with which it deals, its obliqueness and quietness—all this is like subtle piano-playing rather than large orchestration.

It is an admirable passage, but I could never write like that. At the most I might manage a pastiche; it would be dead, however, miles away from a style expressing me personally or socially (I do not think the two can be altogether separated). I am not showing

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an inverted snobbery. Much as I admire the passage above, I know that its movement, the graph of its feelings, the way it approaches its narrative, its timbre, are different from mine—not better nor worse, but different. I would like to learn to score as well for my own imaginative instruments. The peculiar pressure of my approach to experience is partly personal and partly an inheritance from my background. The peculiar movement, the rhythm, of working-class life does not often get into prose—not in the way that Forster's tone may be said to embody the approach to experience of a whole group. In this sense, it is more difficult to find your own right style if you are from the working classes. Almost any ex-working-class writer can produce reasonably lifelike dialogue or remember striking individual words, but you get nowhere by sprinkling "daft" and "mucky" in odd places. I have only once or twice (and then in very brief passages) felt that I was getting into my prose the run or rhythm of my own make-up. This is a problem for any writer at any time, whatever his background. Still, social aspects count; it is easier for certain socially-conditioned manners and tones to express themselves because so much writing has traditionally been expressed in those tones of voice. In the opening of *Sons and Lovers*—not a particularly impressive passage at first glance—the movement, the "kick," and the voice are those of a working-class man who has become articulate. Instead of acquiring rhythms foreign to his deep-rooted ways of feeling, he has kept the rhetoric of his kind and, therefore, can better say what *he* has to say.

The Lawrence opening immediately sounds quite different from that of Forster. The words are used differently; sentences are put together differently; the emotional keyboard is different. To begin with, Lawrence is more direct. Look at the brevity of that first sentence—" 'The Bottoms' succeeded to 'Hell Row.' " The writing hits you more, has more attack—"Hell Row was a *block of thatched, bulging cottages.*" It is more dramatic and demonstrative: "*There* lived the colliers who worked in the little gin-pits. . . ." Emotions seem more plain and exposed, more in front of you—"whose coal was drawn to the surface by donkeys that plodded wearily in a circle round a gin." There is the urgency of those "Ands" used successively to start sentences—"*And* the cottages of these coalminers, in blocks and in pairs. . . ." This passage does not suggest, as does that of Forster, that several centuries of civilized intercourse have given a texture, a variety of weight, and an obliquity and irony, to the prose. It sounds less as though it is meant to be read than as though

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a man is speaking; it recalls the talk in an English working-class home. The passage dives straight into its subject, as though about to *tell a tale,* with the almost jerky directness of a narrator who lets the shape of his paragraph be decided by the immediacy and urgency of the details as they come to him. For me, it recreates something of the peculiar feeling of experience of working-class people, just as E. M. Forster's prose suggests that of the intelligent middle class.

This is not a full account of the differences in tone between these two openings. One must be careful not to ascribe contrasts which may have *many* possible social causes to class differences. Contrasts apparently due to social causes may actually illustrate differences in the personalities of the authors or in what they are trying to do within particular novels. I am not setting one writer against another; one's prose should carry one's own rhythms. The business of finding them, however, produces interesting complications for a writer from the working classes since most of his models, often attractive models, come from and with the tones of other social groups.

References

These notes are virtually confined to publications of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Birmingham University, England, since the Centre's publications bear directly on the approach outlined in this paper.

1. On the general approach, see Richard Hoggart, "Contemporary Cultural Studies: An Approach to the Study of Literature and Society," Occasional Paper No. 6 (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies: Birmingham University, England, 1969).

2. On new media and new forms, see "The Role of Cultural Programmes in British Television," Report for UNESCO (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies: Birmingham University, England, 1968).

3. Edwin Muir, "The Good Town."

4. On trends in mass communications studies within the social sciences, see Edgar Morin, "New Trends in the Study of Mass Communications," Occasional Paper No. 7 (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies: Birmingham University, England, 1969).

5. On sociology and cultural studies, see Rolf Meyersohn, "Sociology and Cultural Studies: Some Problems," Occasional Paper No. 5 (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies: Birmingham University, England, 1969).

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6. On the German nineteenth-century culture and society tradition, see Alan Shuttleworth, "Two Working Papers in Cultural Studies," Occasional Paper No. 2 (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies: Birmingham University, England, 1967).

7. For one application of structuralist anthropology to the mass arts, see Tim Moore, "Claude Lévi-Strauss and the Cultural Sciences," Occasional Paper No. 4 (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies: Birmingham University, England, 1969).

8. For a sharply critical account of the state of structuralism today, see Roger Poole, "Structuralism Sidetracked," *New Blackfriars* (July, 1969).

9. On significant selection, see Richard Hoggart, "The Literary Imagination and the Study of Society," Occasional Paper No. 3 (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies: Birmingham University, England, 1968).

10. J. D. Douglas, *The Social Meanings of Suicide.*

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The Influence of the Black Power Movement on Historical Scholarship: Reflections of a White Historian

THE PAINFUL and dangerous political crisis through which our nation and the world are now passing has had, among many ramifications, a pronounced effect on the humanities. Not for many centuries has the very value—the "usefulness" or "relevance," to use the absurd language of our fashionable youth—of the humanities been subjected to so much malicious and barbarous questioning. Few concerned scholars doubt that a relationship exists between the world-wide crisis in politics (and therefore in morals) and the decline in respect for humane learning, although the specific link occasions intense disagreement. Nor is it any longer possible to hide the unwitting complicity of so many humanists in their own degradation; the increasing acquiescence of the American intelligentsia in a vulgar instrumentalist attitude toward natural and social science has reached scandalous proportions, and few humanists any longer speak out strongly for scientific education informed by those historically developed values that only the humanities can lay bare and discipline.

If this condition forces humanists to reassess their own work and to reaffirm its value while appreciating its limits, then the disastrous decline can be arrested and the dangers transformed into possibilities. I do not here wish to enter into a discussion of the roots of the crisis or of the proper place of the humanities; in collaboration with Christopher Lasch, I have presented a point of view on the former problem and could not hope to improve on Eric Weil's formulation of the latter.[1] Rather, I should like to address this paper to only one of the constituent problems—the short- and long-term influences of political currents in a democratic society on historical scholarship. The recent upsurge of political awareness and participation has had an undeniable im-

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pact on historians, and no small number show increasing nervousness about the implications. The dangers are familiar: Too many are unwilling or unable to resist the temptation to write politically serviceable ideological tracts, whereas too many others flee in panic toward a nonexistent ivory tower from which to view with despair and alarm the end of scholarly integrity. Yet, as a consideration of the impact of the black revolt on historical scholarship will show, neither course is justified. If the political threat to scholarly integrity is real, so are the possibilities for intellectual advance that the very same political thrust offers. A historical profession that knows what it is about and preserves a decent confidence in its own integrity and capacity for collective self-criticism has much to gain and little to risk by confronting political challenges on grounds of its own choosing.

The full impact of the black revolt of the late 1960's on American scholarship in general and Afro-American history in particular has yet to be felt. In part, this delay is the usual one, for even politically volatile scholars, if they are not demagogues or propagandists, need time to assess political trends and to do the work necessary to support their points of view. For this reason much of the scholarly work of the 1960's still reflects the sensibilities and concerns of the civil rights movement of 1954-1964, which after only a few years already seems like some distant Golden Age. A quarter-century struggle to drive racist mystification out of history and social science culminated during those years. In American history this new sensibility encouraged advances in the treatment of such subjects as slavery and Reconstruction, but did not go much beyond the negative work of purging ideological nonsense and of restoring intellectual order. The breathtaking events of the late 1960's, on the other hand, foreshadow a decisive turn in the understanding of our national experience and of the black experience, while paradoxically they threaten the integrity of each discipline they affect. The dangers, which we shall review briefly, are real; the opportunities, fortunately, are far greater, and with them the probabilities.

The direct impact of politics or, rather, of the immediate ideological mood upon historical scholarship has not been nearly so great as is often asserted. The "new history" that emerged from the Progressive Era provides no exception, for its strong and lasting qualities reflected not so much the immediate political concerns as an underlying shift in the economic and cultural life of the nation.

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Recognition of big business as a central fact of life, a growing acceptance of an imperial role for the United States in world affairs, a developing commitment to government action for social welfare, the shift of population cityward and its attendant problems, the end of general immigration—these and other major developments represented a fundamental change in the patterns of national life and the locus of ideological and moral concerns. Undoubtedly, more direct and limited political events influenced particular historians and histories, but we may doubt that they did so in a way to produce much of lasting value.

The vulgar-Marxism of the 1930's and the abortive New Conservatism of the 1950's are more to the point. Little of lasting intellectual value came out of the leftist tumult of the 1930's, notwithstanding countless manifestos, confident proclamations of a new and more scientific history, and heavy disdain for all past "bourgeois" efforts. The reasons for the debacle are not to be sought in the so-called irrelevance of Marxism. This favorite charge of smug ideologues hardly deserves to be taken seriously. If Marxism has any value as a way of interpreting history, then it necessarily has something to say about the American experience. If not, then the problem is not its irrelevance to America but its uselessness. No one with even an elementary understanding of Marxism could possibly fall into the trap of expecting this or any other country to display "Marxian categories" or to conform to some preconceived pattern of development. Marxism in the 1930's degenerated almost immediately into a politically serviceable doctrine designed to bolster one or another set of party strategies, but this prostitution could not have taken place with such ease had a Marxian tradition in American thought existed. Marxist parties in England can say or do as they please and can always produce hacks to write history accordingly. The Marxian interpretations of Hill, Bernal, Thompson, Hobsbawm, Mason, Hilton, and many others go their own way and do so, one suspects, because of the well-entrenched tradition of socialist thought on which to build. The Left in America, sharing as it always has in the prevailing and all-too-American contempt for intellectual tradition, has had little to measure each new dogmatic assertion against.

Similarly, the failure of the New Conservative history in the 1950's, after a brilliant start and an almost clean sweep of the field, suggests that, as a movement, it had no firm roots.[2] Like the vulgar-Marxism of the 1930's, it largely grew up as a political and ideologi-

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cal reaction to immediate events. Consider, for example, how many of its leading figures remained liberals in their politics or were to become so again a few years later; how many shifted their politics only slightly while bending their intellectual efforts to conform with the times. Their work in the 1950's reflected a mood and a need to come to terms with momentous but momentary national and international crises; with few exceptions it did not arise from a deep and genuine conservative tradition or a disciplined and self-conscious attempt to inaugurate one.

Those who fear the negative impact of the present black upsurge on American scholarship would do well to consider the superficiality of the damage done by previous generations of political zealots. Undoubtedly, all the signs of the disease are once again manifest. At their worst, the more shrill ideologues of the black liberation movement recapitulate the totalitarianism of the Left of the 1930's and, in inverted form, of the Right (which, let us recall, included an army of liberals) of the 1950's: A white novelist must not write about a slave rebel, at least not in the first person; whites cannot understand "soul history" and must not teach it; all white criticism of the black experience constitutes "racism"; and so forth *ad nauseam*. We ought not to underestimate the importance of these recurrent manifestations in both the white and black community of moral terror, nor ought we to deflect attention from the duty to combat them vigorously whenever they appear. But their importance must not be exaggerated nor allowed to obscure the much deeper and decidedly healthy impact that the black political revolt is having on American historical scholarship.

The ill-fated Moynihan Report illustrates the limited impact of direct political concern on historical scholarship. Moynihan attempted to put social science at the service of social policy. In so doing, he combined historical with sociological analysis and created a sketch of the "Negro family" or at least of a major historical tendency within the totality of Negro families. We need not here enter into a discussion of the main features of the Report nor of the criticism it evoked, especially since the relationship between theoretical and applied sociology and policy-making obviously raises a different set of problems. The historical dimension of the Report, however, does concern us, for although it covered only a few pages, it properly assumed a large place in the ensuing acrimonious discussion.[3] Moynihan drew on a few standard sources to try to show that slavery and Reconstruction had destroyed black family life or rather

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had prevented its development. The studies in question, notably that of the outstanding sociologist, E. Franklin Frazier,[4] had not, however, been based in their historical dimension on extensive research. Not surprisingly, therefore, the counter-attack is already on. Forthcoming studies, independent of each other, will argue forcefully that a sufficient degree of family cohesion existed among slaves to have laid the foundations for greater stability under freedom and that, in fact, considerable family cohesion was in evidence during and after Reconstruction. Lower-class black family patterns approximated those of lower-class whites at least until World War I and the beginnings of the great trek north.[5] Evaluations of these historical investigations will have to await their publication and the criticism of opposing scholars. When they do appear, they are almost certain to be taken as reactions to the Moynihan Report and as deliberate interventions into the disputes it occasioned. As a matter of fact, they are nothing of the kind. Each has arisen from its author's long developing concern with the culture of the lower classes and in response to the older scholarship of Frazier, Stampp, and others. The controversy over the Moynihan Report may give some form to the new work, may increase popular interest, and may introduce a sharper polemical cutting edge than might have been the case; despite appearances, the origins and fundamental content of these forthcoming studies, except perhaps for an occasional opportunistic and short-lived intellectual gambit, are to be sought elsewhere.

We should resist the temptation to overestimate the impact of immediate political concerns on the course of historical scholarship. There has never been a shortage of academic and political careerists to rush into print at every juncture and to proclaim some new truth to accommodate the latest ideological fad. Happily, such efforts usually disappear with a rapidity that matches their appearance. The ideologically conditioned works leaving a deep impression are generally those that reflect a historical moment that is in itself a culmination of a long process and that represents the crystallization of a "climate of opinion." When, for example, Kenneth M. Stampp published *The Peculiar Institution* in 1956 and stood the racist work of Ulrich Bonnell Phillips on its head, he caught the temper of the mid-1950's, but only in a limited sense.[6] Stampp, a serious and responsible historian, had been at work on his book for many years and could hardly have known that it would appear in the midst of a new wave of pro-black feeling and

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civil rights agitation. Whatever criticisms one might make of the book, it is anything but an attempt to capitalize on a mood or a political moment. The critique of Phillips' views and of those from the Big House generally had been building for twenty-five years or more.

It is doubtful that many professional historians had accepted Phillips' viewpoint on the day before Stampp's book appeared; rather, most seem to have been so thoroughly prepared for a new interpretation that they simply breathed a sigh of relief when a substantial alternative finally arrived. Those twenty-five years had been marked by such books as Charles Sydnor's *Slavery in Mississippi,* which built on Phillips' work while quietly departing from it in many essentials; Herbert Aptheker's *American Negro Slave Revolts,* which challenged Phillips' paternalistic treatment of the slaves at its most vulnerable point; W. E. B. DuBois' *Black Reconstruction,* which even a profession overflowing with white racism could not wholly ignore; and disturbing methodological assaults on Phillips by Richard Hofstadter and Stampp himself. These provided only the most visible and widely read items; the literature pointing toward a new departure was in fact greater.[7]

To lay bare the relationship between the evolving climate of opinion and this historical revisionism would require a full-length intellectual history, but certain features stand out immediately. The anthropological assault on racism gained momentum during the 1920's, but its impact on the historical profession was minimal. It remains an open question how much the new anthropology prepared historians to resist racist doctrines and how much the revulsion against Hitlerism and the attraction of New Deal liberalism and its urban political coalition forced them to take seriously a body of thought they had deftly ignored. What is clear enough is that the power of the new viewpoint lay precisely in the conjuncture of a decade or so of serious scholarship and the force of political circumstances. One or the other alone might have generated a revisionist history, but the conjuncture guaranteed a sweeping victory. By the time that *The Peculiar Institution* appeared—and this observation in no way slights Stampp's formidable accomplishment—it was virtually an ideological anticlimax.

Not surprisingly, the reaction against Stampp's neo-abolitionism began almost immediately. Stanley M. Elkins' *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life,* probably the most vigorously contested book yet written on the subject, in effect

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took the discussion in a new direction by demonstrating that Stampp had remained on the terrain staked out by Phillips even while opposing him.[8] Elkins chose to take the evils of slavery as given and to pose the question of the system's psychological effect on its victims. Historians' reactions to the book were generally hostile, at least initially, whereas those of social scientists were appreciative and even enthusiastic. For our immediate purposes the disquiet it occasioned among the black intelligentsia is more to the point, although black historians of varying political complexion have generally been fair and measured in their appraisals.

What is not often appreciated is that Elkins' *Slavery* represents one of the highpoints of the New Conservative scholarship of the 1950's. That it has not gone the way of most of the efforts of that transitory movement is a tribute to Elkins' intellectual gifts, but it also demonstrates that Stampp had closed an old chapter rather than opened a new one. As Elkins wrote, once Stampp had replied adequately, there was little else to be accomplished within the old framework. If Elkins' defense of the sambo stereotype disturbed blacks and white liberals, it also reinforced some of their own major arguments. There has hardly been an outstanding leader of any fraction of the black liberation movement who has not called upon his people to renounce the legacy of slavery and to assert manhood. Had Elkins' main thesis been offered with adequate qualifications, in slightly different language, without so many debatable secondary theses, and perhaps in different ideological terms, it is likely that the reception would have been entirely different. In any case, in view of the hostility of historians in general to his bold use of psychological models and historical analogy, and in view of the shivers occasioned by the sambo thesis itself, the rising respect for the book, even among its determined opponents, deserves comment.

It seems to me that Elkins' achievement, like that of Stampp, resulted from a convergence of internal and external circumstances.[9] (I, of course, take for granted the talent of the authors, which, as a long line of able but ignored black historians could testify, would hardly have been enough to get a respectful hearing.) The staying power of the works of both Elkins and Stampp has resulted from their having heightened and crystallized long-developing trends within the academic profession and simultaneously having illuminated important political trends. We have here an illustration of the point that S. Lilley makes for the history of

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science. Between those who argue for the centrality of social forces and those who argue for a self-propelling history of scientific ideas, Lilley insists that the source of major advances must be sought in the conjuncture of both.[10] Far from being a plea for a spiritless eclecticism, this viewpoint represents an attempt to take full account of the power of material conditions broadly defined, while it appreciates the role of intellectual labor in giving substance as well as form to those material conditions.

The second half of the 1950's exhibited a growing concern for civil rights and for the integration of the black man into American life and yet continued to display strong evidence of neo-conservatism and Cold War liberalism. The works of Stampp and Elkins fit well into this complex setting. They did not in any way reflect the more vulgar political impulses of the time, but neither did they directly challenge prevalent commitments. For our purposes the politically dominant mood can be seen as extending in two directions—it prepared the ground for a positive public reception of certain lines of thought and also prepared the historical profession itself. In this respect the works of these historians bridged the gap between the prevailing national sensibility and the cumulative and developing understanding of the academic intelligentsia. Therein lies its significance and its power. In short, the question of the effect of politics on scholarship must be understood primarily as the intersection of two derivatives of a common source that is at once political and scholarly since it shapes the thinking of the intelligentsia, in itself an artistic and scientific establishment and a political force of considerable consequence.

The political developments of the second half of our decade must be assessed in these terms, for while superficially pointing one way, ultimately they point another. The abrupt shift of SNCC in the mid-1960's may serve as an adequate illustration of the more general shift of the black liberation movement. From radical integrationism and nonviolence SNCC moved to "Black Power" and a defense of revolutionary violence. The content of Black Power remains obscure, but there can be no question of its separatist and nationalist overtones. That SNCC has largely disappeared as a political organization is beside the point. The desperate about-face in its point of view signalled a change in the temper of the entire black liberation movement, albeit to new forms that the older leadership has had trouble mastering. The black political landscape in the last few years has been dominated by such left-

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wing revolutionary nationalist groups as the Black Panther Party, such rightwing nationalist groups as Ron Karenga's US, and such vacillating groups as the revamped CORE under Roy Innis, which combines radical rhetoric with a shame-faced espousal of black capitalism.

Whatever the forms of black militancy in the 1970's, certain intellectual advances seem destined for consolidation. I do not refer to the appearance of black nationalism as such, for that is a story as old as the struggle of black people against oppression and white racism in America. Previous waves of black nationalism left few traces in the intellectual life of white America and, for that matter, only a weak if nonetheless discernible and pregnant legacy for black America. The current wave, on the other hand, should cast a long shadow over both for discrete but intersecting reasons.

Previous waves of black nationalism were almost entirely a product of the counsel of despair. They generally represented a defensive reflex in periods of defeat, desertion by white allies, and paralysis of the national conscience. Without disparaging the integrity of their fundamental content, they may be viewed as rear-guard actions in an overpowering and hostile environment. An insensitive, not to say racist, intellectual milieu virtually drowned their intellectual products. These are increasingly known and respected in black America, but until recently their message even there was severely circumscribed by white intellectual hegemony. W. E. B. DuBois, of course, could not easily be ignored, but how many white scholars even today appreciate the nationalist side of his complex thought? Yet, the present generation of black nationalist scholars and, more to the point, the generation that is clearly on the way represent a new intellectual as well as political force not necessarily because they are or will be more talented than their predecessors, but because they are emerging at a historically propitious moment.

Politically, the Black Power movement marks a new stage, for it combines cultural and social separatism with a sober appraisal of the realities of an integrated national and international economy. The shape of a future united black liberation movement, if one ever develops, may be left to those directly concerned, but the implications of the persistent combination of separatist social and integrationist economic demands must be understood as an embryonic program rather than as some new rhetorical incoherence.[11] In these terms, the insistence of the younger black intelligentsia

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on a nationalist interpretation of Afro-American history has special force, for it corresponds—at least up to a point—with that temper of the new realism among both blacks and whites which has been generated by the collapse of the integrationist dreams of the 1950's. The singular failure of liberal integrationism has demonstrated, if nothing else, the extent to which blacks are perceived and perceive themselves as a people apart—a people with a separate history, culture, and national sensibility. The first point of conjuncture, then, arises from a new and determined effort by a rising black intelligentsia to delineate a separate national history for black America. Obviously, this effort would have poor prospects did it not conform to historical reality. We shall return to an evaluation and try to demonstrate, among other things, that the nationalist thesis presents an unusually complex set of problems.

Thus far we have glanced only at the external side of the problem—at the emergence of black and white politics in relation to the unfolding receptivity among both blacks and whites to a black nationalist standpoint in historical interpretation. But what of the internal condition, by which we understand the intellectual preparation of the black intelligentsia and of the dominant white elements of the historical profession? The nationalist stream in black thought, as has been suggested, is long-standing and runs deep. If we bracket for a moment the question of its intellectual legitimacy (its inherent truth), there can be no doubt about its social authenticity (its roots in the inner intellectual history of the black community). Yet in the past white America has ignored or rejected this line of thought. Even liberal and anti-racist scholars have treated it as a pathological projection of a people whose only hope, ostensible desire, and practical destiny lay in integration. The collapse of liberal integrationism, which may or may not spell the end of all integrationism, and the burgeoning of a variety of militant and apparently anti-integrationist Black Power movements have shaken the white intelligentsia and opened the way to its giving black nationalism a hearing, both in its political and intellectual manifestations. But even within the white-dominated academy of historical scholarship, quite different forces have been at work, and their intersection with those just reviewed promises to reinforce the tendency toward a more sympathetic hearing for a nationalist black history.

I refer to the growing emphasis on cultural history in general and on the history of the lower classes in particular. Although the

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history of Afro-Americans might be thought to form one dimension of a cultural history of the lower classes, until recently such has not been the case. First, until less than ten years ago Afro-American history held little or no interest for white historians. Books and articles in learned journals were few and far between. Since the white intelligentsia has controlled the main accesses to publication, the blacks have had to wage a bitter struggle with meagre resources to develop and present their own points of view. Second, the black experience in America has generally been viewed as the history of what Anglo-Saxon barbarism has done to a passive and helpless people. There are a few ironies here. The exclusive concern with race, in contradistinction to class, has inhibited rather than sharpened a concern with black ethnicity, so that even avowedly anti-racist scholarship has unwittingly deprived black people of their own heritage. To this day, despite a library full of books on slavery, we do not have more than a few fragmentary studies of slave life, of the activity of the quarters, of slave religion (understood as something other than the religion that masters thought they were imposing on slaves), or on slave folklore. Slavery and the black experience have been one subject—and a subject usually mauled by the treatment of blacks as objects rather than subjects; lower-class white and immigrant history has been another; labor history, usually interpreted to mean trade-union history, has been a third; and "cultural history," by which is generally meant an account of high culture, has been a fourth. Rarely if ever do we find the kind of history in which, say, the lives of black workers are studied as points of intersection among black history *per se*, the interaction of the various ethnic components of the working class, and the relationship of popular to high culture. During the last ten years, however, this intellectual insanity has finally come under sustained attack. The New Left upsurge, with its renewed populism, and the impressive intellectual history of the 1950's—one thinks especially of Perry Miller's work—have combined to create favorable conditions for, and have in fact demanded, that synthesis of popular and elite thought and behavior that only an integrated cultural history could make possible.

Scholars, especially black scholars, have long explored the cultural dimension of Afro-American history. Everyone reads DuBois' *Souls of Black Folk*, but only a handful of scholars, mostly black, have appreciated the elements of a cultural history that it contains. The promise of lasting results comes from the intersection

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of this renewed black effort with two other developments: parallel work by white scholars in the cultural history of the lower classes, and those political conditions converging to guarantee a more sympathetic hearing for black nationalism to which we have already referred.

The insistence of black scholars on the centrality of popular as well as high culture for an understanding of the black experience corresponds to the insistence of a growing number of white historians on the centrality of culture to the American experience generally. This line of thought has recently been applied directly and indirectly to Afro-American history by a wide variety of scholars, notably David Brion Davis, Winthrop D. Jordan, and Herbert Gutman.

Davis and Jordan treat primarily white and especially Anglo-Saxon culture in attempting to account for the origins, force, and extent of racism.[12] Among many outstanding contributions, both identify the problem of racism as a product of a long and complex historical evolution and yet avoid obscuring the functionality of racism within systems of class oppression. Davis' work, moreover, represents a high point in the development of a comparative approach to the study of slavery. This postwar trend, initiated by Frank Tannenbaum, has been continued by such diverse scholars as Sidney Mintz and Marvin Harris in anthropology, Harmannus Hoetink and Arnold A. Sio in sociology, and Stanley M. Elkins and Herbert S. Klein in history. The participation of both historians and social scientists has helped guarantee that slavery must henceforth be treated both internationally and cross-culturally—precisely as Tannenbaum had insisted. Black scholars in the United States have not yet contributed much to this trend, but black and colored scholars in the Caribbean and Brazil have, and their influence is bound to be felt sooner or later.

The introduction of the comparative and cross-cultural dimension has led American historians away from their famous provincialism and into a confrontation with anthropology and popular culture. So, for example, serious students of American slavery can no longer avoid learning something about Brazilian and Cuban slavery. Accordingly, they must come to terms with the broad cultural history of Gilberto Freyre, Fernando Ortiz, and Roger Bastide, to mention only a few outstanding figures. Bastide's *Religions africaines au Brésil* may serve as an illustration. With slave revolts and resistance an important and popular subject in

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the United States, Bastide's provocative analyses of the role of religion in the *quilombo* of Palmares and in the massive Bahia risings can no longer be overlooked. Vincent Harding's essay, in which he insists that the slaves could and often did bend their masters' religion to their own subversive purposes, therefore intersects with similar concerns and theses being advanced elsewhere.[13] One should expect more serious study of these various theses if only because of the way in which they reinforce each other and reflect common origins in a growing concern with the politics of culture in many countries. Even if we take full account of the desire of many black scholars to go their own way and to minimize white influence, we can hardly expect major success in an attempt at intellectual self-isolation; and the new concerns of white scholars themselves are likely to result in an increased attention to the product of black scholarship for reasons quite apart from the course of the racial crisis.

Gutman has set out to reinterpret the history of the American working class and in so doing has come to emphasize the process by which various immigrant groups, especially those from preindustrial settings, became acculturated in the double sense of "Americanized" and integrated into an advanced industrial economy.[14] This concern has naturally led him toward a critical appraisal of the intersection of peasant migrations, the growth of the working class in its particular ethnic manifestations, and the black experience. This new approach to the history of the black and white working class points toward an appreciation of culture as politics.

It would, therefore, be tragic to allow the inevitable but momentary incoherence of these tumultuous years to interfere with a cool appraisal of the long-term potential contributions of the new black militancy to the development of historical studies. The genuine and probably lasting work by black scholars, including the most politically committed and militant, are those which point toward a re-evaluation of black culture and its relationship to the problem of nationality. The most striking achievement so far is perhaps Leroi Jones' *Blues People*, which traces the development of a distinct black music from slavery to freedom in a fresh and incisive way.[15] Jones examines the African roots of black music and ingeniously explores the relationship of the slave and ghetto culture to the musical expression of black people. Here, as in such essays as Sterling Stuckey's "Through the Prism of Folklore:

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Black Ethos in Slavery,"[16] black scholars are attempting to write a responsible history of the inarticulate masses. In view of the appearance of this trend at the moment in which so many white intellectual historians are passing over to cultural history, and in view of the political pressures toward a pro-nationalist position, this trend is likely to gain strength.

The positive response to Harold W. Cruse's *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*[17] suggests a new receptivity to the explorations of this theme. Ironically, Cruse's bitter indictment of the American intelligentsia for its insensitivity to the cultural dimension of politics and historical process comes at the very moment in which that insensitivity seems on its way out. (But, of course, Cruse's book itself is helping to bring about this result.) He comes down with special severity on Marxists, whose alleged intellectual hegemony in Harlem during the 1930's and 1940's he deplores, and charges them with being imprisoned by an ideology that waives culture as mere "superstructure" in favor of a primary concern with "economic base." Yet these strictures appear when the long-term influence of William Appleman Williams and the steadily gaining awareness of the work of Antonio Gramsci are combining to reorient serious American Marxists in just the way Cruse demands. These objections aside, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* has undoubtedly affected the thinking of both white and black intellectuals in an altogether positive way.

So, we might add, has Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*.[18] Another irony lurks here, for Cleaver's book has also helped to demonstrate the cultural dimension of politics and history despite Cleaver's being the leading black nationalist opponent of the "cultural nationalist" trend in the movement. If Cleaver is hostile toward specific manifestations of Afro-American culture, and if he is particularly suspicious of attempts to make cultural-nationalist concerns a substitute for politics, he still devotes most of his space to the cultural dimension of what he considers to be the essentials of a revolutionary political point of view. In other words, the emphasis on cultural questions in the black movement is not likely to recede even if the leftwing Panther tendency gains ascendancy; for all its hostility to cultural nationalism, it too finds it difficult to avoid doing battle on this terrain.

Although the new phase of the black revolt in its direct political form will continue to make an impact on scholarship, it is unlikely to have any more lasting effects than earlier white movements.

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In the short run, of course, anything is possible. Undoubtedly, we are witnessing the rise of a new type, the "house honkey," who is replacing the "house nigger" of by-gone days. In the intellectual arena, these "honkeys" will do their best to preserve and extend the romantic interpretation of black history, with all its supposed political advantages to this or that movement. However irritating, they present no serious threat and ought to be regarded with no more fear or misgivings than any other wave of opportunist mediocrity.

The danger, rather, lies in the subtle encouragement of reactive history that these tense and difficult circumstances produce. The shrill and insistent demands that whites get out of black history could not be met, even if whites were inclined to meet them: The history of America can no longer be written without a full account of its black element; and that element cannot be isolated for discrete analysis since it penetrates and has been penetrated by everything else. This lesson has, ironically, been taught us by the effective blows delivered against the racism of white intellectuals by the black intellectuals themselves. What may occur (and there are already ominous signs) is a steady, barely visible retreat by white scholars into a historical study that merely reacts—whether positively or negatively is of little importance—to the supposed exigencies of the political struggle and the real or imagined provocations of the more militant black intellectuals. Blacks have justly complained that for too long their best historians have wasted much of their time and energy reacting to biased and ignorant white scholarship and refuting one or another fashionable interpretation. The damage done to black scholarship by this tendency has probably been as great as its black critics suggest, but at least it has had the excuse of reflecting the exigencies of the social and political balance of power in racist America. A white version of the same thing would have no excuse at all, unless we count an adolescent compulsion to respond to every expression of hostility from people who are not exactly without commanding reason to be hostile.

I have so far tried to show that the black political revolt, with its increasingly nationalist and separatist influence among the youth and especially the young intellectuals, has generated a major concern for culture as politics and history and that this concern will probably be consolidated as a contribution to both American and Afro-American history since it occurs at one of those

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fateful conjunctures of external and internal events. Beyond this general achievement lies another one of a different but no less important order: the development of an Afro-American nationalist history. So far we have bracketed the question of the legitimacy of the nationalist interpretation of Afro-American history. It is time to remove the brackets.

In the past black nationalism has made little impact on American scholarship and left only scattered traces in the much ignored Afro-American scholarship. Previous black scholars of a nationalist bent have generally had to work in isolation or at least without much material support. Black nationalist movements, especially the large ones of Garvey and Elijah Muhammed, never attracted many intellectuals and generally left little or no direct historical interpretations of the black experience, however much they may have contributed to the formation of one by successors.[19] Perhaps the most striking and far-reaching feature of the black nationalism of the 1960's has been the unprecedented identification of young intellectuals with a mass movement. It seems safe to say that if the nationalist movements coalesce and endure, their success will be due in a large measure to this achievement. The adherence of so many talented black intellectuals—Harold W. Cruse, Julius Lester, Leroi Jones, Eldridge Cleaver, Vincent Harding, A. B. Spellman, and many others—to one or another wing of the nationalist movement in itself creates a new situation with overtones of a self-fulfilling prophecy. If, as could be demonstrated, the black experience in America has yielded a common body of interest, strong elements of a discrete culture, and a general sense of being a distinct people, then the creation of a separate nation—although not necessarily a nation-state—is within the grasp of the black intelligentsia as an act of will: All that has been missing in the attempt to forge such a nation has been a unifying ideology capable of commanding the respect of the intelligentsia and the political allegiance of the masses.

I cannot here do more than to assert, without adequate elaboration and defense, what seems to me to be the central theme—to borrow the term Phillips made famous in Southern History—of Afro-American history: the duality of the black presence as a vital and inseparable part of the national American experience and yet a national experience unto itself. As August Meier has convincingly argued in *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915*,[20] and as the apparently zig-zag ideological course of the great W. E. B.

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DuBois perfectly illustrates, the history of black America may be viewed, on one level of analysis, as a record of alternating and simultaneous integrationist and separatist responses to white oppression. Meier plausibly suggests that integrationism has prevailed among blacks during those periods when for one reason or another whites needed and sought black support for national purposes and were prepared to make some concessions toward the realization of black aspirations; alternatively, he adds, separatism and nationalism have shown great strength during periods of defeat, despair, and acute and open white hostility. From this point of view, he correctly judges Booker T. Washington, for all his accommodationism, to have contributed in important ways to black nationalism.

The question of the legitimacy of the nationalist political tendency might be left right there, but it would be a mistake to do so. David Potter maintains, in his brilliant essay, "The Historians' Use of Nationalism and Vice Versa,"[21] that it would be naive and dangerous to proceed as if the only psychological basis for nationalism lies in the evolution of a common culture. Potter suggests that a nationalist psychology has a second and often stronger basis in a perceived common interest. Where such an interest exists over a long period of time, a strong national feeling may develop among a people even in the absence of a separate culture. Potter is concerned with the Old South, not Afro-America, and insists on the paucity of evidence of a distinct Southern culture until the slaveholding intellectuals, cognizant of the threat to their social system, set out to create one. In an analogous way, one might judge the nationalist response, which has always had manifestations in the black community, as a defensive rationale rather than a legitimate projection of a national life. I doubt that Potter means to propose so mechanical a formula for any national movement. If I understand him correctly, he is suggesting that even weak elements of a separate culture can be wielded into a powerful force under the whip of a politically well-situated intelligentsia, which, in response to a threat to a genuine community of interest, deliberately bends its efforts toward the formation of a coherent nationally-based world view.

The black intellectuals, especially the younger ones, today are doing just that. Their insistence on a nationalist interpretation of black culture and black history may be one-sided, but it is by no means irresponsible, as is so often charged. The elements of a

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separate culture, however weak, are there and are capable of being raised to the dignity of a discrete social and ideological formulation. Slavery, for example, did create conditions within which there developed a particular religion (the African and distinctly Afro-American features of which are yet to be analyzed adequately), folklore, music, dialect, and group sensibility, and postwar conditions in both the rural South and the Northern ghettos reshaped and fortified the product. Thus, we hear much of a "Negro subculture." Left there, perhaps that is all we would ever see—disparate and even pathetic manifestations of a people who are trying to be part of the American nation and yet who can never quite win acceptance. But that body of common interest—that perpetual threat to existence—has given special meaning to those cultural manifestations. Until recently, however, the forces have not existed to wield them into a single ideology, to relate them coherently to a perceived common interest, to blend the folk elements with an embryonic high culture, and to unite a vigorous intelligentsia to the masses. Now they do. The emergence of a black intelligentsia, conscious of the historical evolution of a community of interest, has within itself the power to forge a separate culture out of a tradition that has been both of America and a thing apart. In view of the white-racist resistance to integration, the victory of this tendency seems probable. The current group of black historians may or may not write the comprehensive nationalist interpretation of Afro-American history for which it calls, but it is at least laying the ideological and organizational basis for it.

We may expect to arrive, therefore, at a new view of Afro-American history, whatever the political outcome of the present turmoil. If the nationalist movement scores substantial gains, this view will be immensely strengthened; if it is crushed or substantially beaten back, the strategic position of the young nationalist intelligentsia is still likely to guarantee the consolidation of a considerable portion of its interpretation of the historical record. Are we then at the threshold of a new mythology and a new version of history-as-ideology? Yes and no. The tendency toward myth-making and ideological interpretation will certainly grow stronger—directly if the nationalists can deliver a major political victory, indirectly and nostalgically if they cannot. But such a tendency has always pervaded the histories of white and black peoples alike. It represents a persistent threat to intellectual integrity, but one that can be contained if never wholly defeated.

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Those who fear that an ideological-mythical history will triumph in black studies display a droll underestimation of white racism and professional conservatism in American life and a grave misunderstanding of the position of the black man within and without our national society. Large sectors of the historical profession and the secondary teaching profession for the best and worst of reasons will continue to oppose the romantic and mystical interpretation of the black experience. So long as this interpretation encounters opposition among respected and serious historians, white and black, and so long as there is no danger of a reactionary black ascendancy within the professional institutions themselves, prospects for the growth of a sane and empirically balanced view will remain bright. The young black intelligentsia, especially the students, might defect *en masse* to mythology, but their defection is certain to be arrested and reversed if it generates—as it probably will—political defeats in place of the promised victories. A brief consideration of the position of the blacks in American life will show the improbability of a sustained and consolidated defection.

Were black Americans to secede from the American Union and to get those five states they demand, then a fairy-tale history could become government policy and the only tolerated viewpoint in a black state. But even so—and such totalitarianism would by no means have to accompany separation—black history would continue to be studied in quite a different way in white-dominated America. If, as is the overwhelming probability, black Americans will find some kind of half-way house between integration and separation, then there will be little likelihood of insulating a romantic interpretation from withering criticism.

Without enforced insulation, the majority of even the most militant black youth could not be expected to remain ideologically imprisoned for long. A mystique may imprison some men forever, but to imprison most men for long, it must accompany real political victories. Many black youths today openly defend a romanticized and mystified history by reference to the exigencies of revolutions like the Algerian. Even if we could admit that ideological mystification helped rather than retarded the Algerian or other national revolutions, an extrapolation to black America would be nonsensical. In black America the prospects for the secession of a contiguous colonial area are nil, and so are the prospects for the forcible overthrow of the American national state. Under these

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conditions the struggle for black liberation will have to be a protracted one that can combine both integrationist and separatist advances. Hence, only an objective history is likely to be politically useful for the long haul, and the black intelligentsia would sooner or later have to come to terms with this reality or face an interminable series of defeats. In any case, the prospects for intellectual and ideological insulation in so complex a social setting are, to say the least, poor.

The permanent and invaluable contribution rendered by the new nationalist militancy to historical scholarship rests on its ability to compel attention to the genuine duality of the black experience, even if it chooses to stress the side it prefers. In that duality lies most of what is essential to an understanding of black history in the United States as well as to the probable ideological shape of a viable black liberation movement. If so, then the impact of the current political disorder on historical scholarship will be judged, in some calmer future, to have been on balance wholesome, constructive, and long overdue.

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TALCOTT PARSONS

Theory in the Humanities and Sociology

I

As a nonhumanist in a discipline—sociology—that stands relatively close to the humanities, I shall make bold to carry out my assignment by essaying a conception of the humanities that seems to me to be consonant with my conceptualization of both the behavioral-social sciences and the natural sciences. All of them, I think, should be treated as intellectual disciplines concerned with gaining rational knowledge of the human condition and of its products and environment. I include in the concept "environment" the cultural or symbolic systems which, like artifacts, are at one level clearly human creations or products of human action, whatever their sources in other respects may be interpreted to be.

The concept of rational knowledge in this sense involves the two basic methodological standards of science—namely logical clarity and coherence—and empirical validity. The disciplines in this sense vary not with respect to the relevance of these standards, but with respect to the nature of the objects they study, and consequently the more specific standards and methods appropriate in implementing the general standards. Another way of putting this point is to say that as modes of action oriented to valid knowledge, the disciplines (German *Wissenschaften*) share the primacy of the values of cognitive rationality, but the modes of implementation of these values vary as a function of the type of object studied, the type of interest manifested, the variety of data available, and the method appropriate for such study.

Knowledge, in the sense of this discussion, is what I should call a *cultural* object, or set of such objects. It consists of entities which at one level are physical, for example, black marks on white paper, but the significance of which derives from the fact that they are

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interpreted to be symbols (or at least some kind of signs) that have "meanings" capable of interpretation in terms of a *code*. The prototype for such a symbolic system is perhaps a language, and recent advances in the science of linguistics have helped greatly to clarify the nature of such systems.

In my own work I have found it useful to employ the concept of *action*, in a special technical sense,[1] to designate what may be considered to be the central sector of a spectrum of classes of objects that can be and have been studied by cognitively rational disciplines. At each end of the spectrum, the objects of study are themselves not conceived as "acting," but the process of studying them is a process of action. These two end sectors are, first, systems of symbolic meaning, which I should call *cultural* and, second, *physical* systems. The middle sector is that in which the object, treated as itself engaged in action in my technical sense, is also an object of cognitively rational study. In each of the end sectors, though in different ways, the process of study (one of action) differs from the properties characterizing the objects of study—though in different ways at each end—whereas in the middle sector student and object are conceived to be of the same generic order of "reality."[2] The middle sector, thus conceived, constitutes what are usually called the social and/or behavioral disciplines. My central criterion is that the objects studied should be conceived as actors, sectors of their action—for example, "acts"—and/or systems generated by the interaction of a plurality of actors, but still composed of actors.

The "action" disciplines in this sense are, on the one hand, anchored in the physical world, which is conceived in the broad sense as including living organisms insofar as their behavior is not oriented in terms of cultural-symbolic systems. (There are, of course, important transitional cases, in aspects of concrete human behavior and in that of many subhuman species.) At the same time, action systems are anchored, in the "orientation" sense, in cultural systems. In this technical sense we are "concerned" with symbolic systems and their relevance for action. Symbolic systems are both products of the action process and determinants of its further course, though, of course, neither the sole class of products nor the sole class of determinants.

Using this frame of reference to define the place of the humanities has certain consequences and raises certain questions. The first consequence is to treat the humanities as belonging squarely in the category of the intellectual disciplines.[3] This clearly implies draw-

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ing a sharp line between humanistic scholarship on the one hand and creative artistic performance on the other. The output of the creative artist constitutes perhaps the most important class of the objects of humanistic studies. The fact that the process of creating them is one of human action, of course, distinguishes these outputs from the natural phenomena studied by the natural sciences. The humanities are, however, as noted above, continuous with the social-behavioral disciplines in that the latter study both the outputs of the processes of human action and the processes themselves. But even the natural sciences surely have the problem not only of coldly observing and analyzing the phenomena they study, but of managing their emotional reactions to them. The latter problem includes the place of appreciation of the "beauties of nature," which has played a major part in the history of natural science, as well as the horror engendered by what has been called "nature red in tooth and claw."

The humanities and the social-behavioral sciences share a further problem arising from the study of human action and certain classes of its products. They must "interpretively" attempt to understand, in the sense of the German concept *Verstehen,* the subjective meanings of that action and those products by "sharing" in some sense the motives and experience of the actors involved and by putting themselves in the place of those actors, including the creative artist. This is an essential aspect of the empirical reference of these disciplines.[4]

In these terms the humanities belong among the intellectual disciplines that study the *content* of human culture (so far as we know, fully developed culture is not to be found in the life of any other organic species). Moreover, it is Northrop Frye's position that the center of literary criticism should lie in the symbolic content of literary works themselves, rather than in the study of nonliterary influences that may have played a part in their genesis and development.

The question still arises, however, of whether the humanities should be conceived as including all of the disciplines that study symbolic system content. This question most clearly concerns those disciplines in which not only is the cultural content "symbolic," but in which the standards used by the practitioners and critics of the field to judge the content are essentially those of cognitive rationality. In general terms, philosophy is usually thought to belong to the humanities, though the standards of evaluation of philosophical out-

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put are clearly very different from those of poetry as depicted by Frye. This is even more the case with some branches of philosophy, such as logic, which has recently developed increasingly close relations to mathematics, a discipline few would classify as humanistic. Logic and mathematics are, in a sense, limiting cases, where the "content" of the symbolic systems has virtually no reference corresponding to the empirical component of the sciences or the human "experience" somehow "expressed" in the arts.[5] Another interesting and important case is that of law as a formal discipline. This, however, seems much closer to literary criticism by the above criteria than to mathematics.

Thus, with respect to the first problem, my suggestion for a definition of the humanities is restrictive, relative to the practice of many who are called humanists. It tries to include humanistic studies among the intellectual disciplines and thereby to exclude *from* them components which do not fit the conception of an intellectual discipline—such as the "meaning" of poetry as "experienced" by the poet or his appreciative readers (Frye) as distinguished from the view of its meaning elicited by the processes of critical scholarship. On the other front, however, within the general rubric of the intellectual disciplines, I should tend to be inclusive rather than exclusive, including philosophy as a humanistic discipline and even playing with the idea of also including mathematics.

There is, however, an alternative that should be stated. We may consider the place of a set of disciplines that deal not with classes of objects in the ordinary sense, but with what may perhaps be called the "frames of reference" within which objects are "known." This category might include mathematics and at least a large part of philosophy, possibly at least part of linguistics and of theology. Such disciplines would naturally have to deal with questions of the relations between cognitively rational knowledge and other human modes of "experiencing" both the environment and the self. The central issue here is not this problem, but rather the clear statement and defense of my contention that the humanities should be treated as intellectual disciplines, especially as distinguished from the creative arts, and that as such they should be clearly distinguished from the social sciences, precisely *as* two different kinds of intellectual disciplines.

Before leaving these introductory considerations, something should be said of religion. Along with language, which is above all a medium of expression and communication, religion stands very near

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the core of the phenomena of culture. It is, however, never *only* cultural. As *object*, in the modern world, religion is properly studied by a series of disciplines, including but not confined to the humanistic. For example, Clifford Geertz, following in a great tradition, has published a much-discussed paper under the title "Religion as a Cultural System," which I should consider to embody essentially a humanistic approach.[6] Emile Durkheim, on the other hand, in his work on religion, took essentially a sociological approach, and, to cite one of the most famous, the case of William James was primarily pychological. Max Weber's work, finally, embodied all three; the cultural component was very strong as was the sociological, with the psychological somewhat less prominent, although quite definitely present. Religion as object, therefore, is relevant to all classes of intellectual disciplines except the natural sciences in a central sense. Even in the natural sciences two possible modes of relevance come to mind. One is the relevance of certain physiological states to what is felt to be "religious experience," most recently illustrated, perhaps, by the claims of some drug users that psychedelics can produce authentic religious experiences. The other is the relevance of a "world-view," of which the findings of natural science form an important part, to religious definitions of the human condition. It is a commonplace that both the Copernican revolution and the advent of Darwinism occasioned major disturbances in the religious world. Finally, it goes without saying that the distinction between the study of religion and its practice is vital and essentially parallel to Frye's distinction between literary criticism and the "practice" of poetry.

II

The above suggestions for the placing of the humanities, both *as* intellectual disciplines and *within* the system of intellectual disciplines, have been stated within a very general framework. The main topic of this paper, however, is the relation between sociology and the humanities; but to help clarify some of the implications of the position just outlined, I will first follow these implications with respect to three general methodological issues. The first of these is the role of what are often called "subjective" references in the empirical and hence, at certain levels, the theoretical content and structure of the disciplines. In German terminology of an earlier generation, this has been referred to as the problem of the status of the category *Verstehen* (possibly translatable as "interpretive understanding") and

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above all, its relation to the problem of explanation. The second is the problem of the relation between individuality and generalized theoretical conceptualization, again sometimes phrased as the respective places of ideographic and nomothetic conceptualization. These issues I should like to discuss mainly in the frame of reference of German controversies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries because I was directly involved with them in my formative period. Max Weber made special contributions in both connections. The third issue is the relation of the cognitive component to the more general complex of culture, especially to the status of the intellectual disciplines in the culture of modern societies. This is particularly closely bound up with that of the role and nature of theory in the intellectual disciplines.

The first two issues concern the nature of the objects studied in the various disciplines. In both cases there was strong defense of the view that such considerations necessitated a sharp dichotomy between two classes of disciplines, the *Geistes-* or *Kulturwissenschaften* on the one hand, and the *Naturwissenschaften* on the other.[7] With this dichotomy was associated the thesis that where *Geist* or *Kultur* was involved, the method of explanation had to be *Verstehen;* where *Natur* was involved, it was *causal* explanation. There was, furthermore, the thesis that explanation had to be of one *or* the other type, that they were mutually exclusive.

In that cultural milieu it was Max Weber, far more than any other figure, who broke through this dilemma—the main structure of which went back to Kant. He laid the foundations for the three-fold classification of the intellectual disciplines outlined above, which has broadly come to be institutionalized in the modern university system. The major steps were two. First was the clear distinction between two kinds of *Verstehen* or "subjective interpretation." One was the classical Diltheyan mode of grasp of *Sinnzusammenhänge,* or complexes of meaning, presumably expressed in symbolic form. The other mode Weber called *motivationsmässiges Verstehen,* or interpretation of the subjectively intended *motives* of action. The latter Weber asserted to be fully compatible with the canons of causal explanation, and, in his famous definition of sociology, he stated that its objective as a discipline was *both deutend Verstehen* and causal explanation, which many critics of his time asserted to be a direct contradiction in terms.

It can be concluded that, at their core, the natural sciences do not interpret subjective meaning at all, however many transitions in this

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direction there may be. The humanities, on the other hand, do not attempt, at their core, as Frye defines it, to explain causally, but rather to interpret meanings in a cognitively rational framework. The social-behavioral disciplines, however, necessarily *combine both* since human motives always involve reference to cultural-symbolic systems of meaning. (Here I should speak of reflexes and "instincts" in the older sense, as to some extent "submotives.")

The meanings with which the humanities deal are important to human actors, both those who create the symbolic systems in question and those who, as audience, feel their impact, are influenced or "moved" by them, or lack such reactions. No "empirically" minded humanist can fail to be concerned with such "contextual" problems; indeed, many elevate them into the status of the "core" problems. Thus, perhaps above all, two predominantly nonhumanistic thinkers of the last century have been much touted as providing the essential keys to certain classes of humanistic studies, namely Marx and Freud.

The indicated conclusion from Weber's position, which I share, would be that the core theoretical focus of the humanistic disciplines should be considered to rest in a specific pattern of *abstraction* from the total mass of relevant considerations or facts, and that the humanist should attempt to formulate selective principles by which he can identify the features of his objects of study relevant to these core problems. This selective abstraction is, of course, one of the primary bases of *theory* in all of the intellectual disciplines. It seems to me that this is one of the main bases on which the "belongingness" of the humanities in the larger corpus of intellectual disciplines can be analyzed and justified.

Such a statement of the core role of a distinctive theory does not solve the problem of the humanist who does not wish to neglect what I have called contextual problems and phenomena, such as the determinants of a writer's life history or the impact of a work on subsequent societal development. Here it seems clear to me, if one adheres to the position stated, that such treatment requires theoretical articulation with the relevant disciplines in other categories, notably the social-behavioral disciplines, but also possibly some of the natural sciences. This question will be taken up more in detail in the next section, but a type case may be cited in Erikson's psychological biography of Martin Luther.[8] Erikson was concerned with the motivational background, in Luther's personality and life history, of his *culturally* creative act of breaking with the Catholic Church and

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formulating the cultural foundation of Protestantism. On the cultural side, Erikson had to rely on humanistic studies; but on the psychological side, he wrote not as an amateur, but as a professionally trained and experienced psychoanalyst, who used psychoanalytic theory at a fully professional level to analyze a particular life history.

The second methodological issue, that of ideographic versus nomothetic conceptualization, has been closely related, with the first also growing out of a Kantian background. The most salient feature of the position was the contention that this distinction created the necessity of two sets of totally separate disciplines, with the *Geisteswissenschaften* concerned only with "historical" uniqueness. Generalized conceptualization had no relevance whatever to their problems. This issue is particularly important because the status of "theory" has very generally been associated with generalization. Hence the older German position has been widely interpreted to imply that to hold humanistic studies to "theoretical" standards was to derogate their special distinctiveness and hence their virtues.

Since Weber was primarily a *social* scientist, he was caught in the middle in this dilemma. He resolved it by denying that it was a dilemma in the concrete sense, by asserting that *all* of the intellectual disciplines necessarily dealt with phenomena that were at some level unique, and indeed by emphasizing their uniqueness. At the same time Weber saw all such disciplines as also having to develop and utilize generalized theoretical concepts and propositions in order to deal with many of the problems they encountered. This implied an emphasis on the importance of abstraction. No cognitively conceptual "account" of a phenomenon or class of phenomena ever states and grasps "all the facts" which are or can be known about the phenomenon. Whether the object be to establish and highlight certain *significant* aspects of uniqueness, or to establish that this is an authentic case of a generalization, the evidence used *must* be selective. The criteria of valid selection then must, at least in part, be theoretical.

A further point is the relativity of the distinction between the unique and the general aspects of components of scientific description and analysis. Generally speaking, uniqueness is described in terms of special *combinations* and proportions of components that also figure in generalized descriptions and analyses. To take an example from biology, the genetic constitution of every higher organism, certainly of every human being (except identical twins), is unique. This is a fact of cardinal importance. But this genetic consti-

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tution has been analyzed in terms of complex chemical components that are organized into a "code." The components and certain rules of their operating together as "genes," for example, is definitely part of a highly generalized system of biochemical variables *not* unique to any one species, to say nothing of an individual organism.

Weber demonstrated, to the satisfaction of most social science methodologists, the falsity of the alleged dilemma. He started with the tendency of the German scholarship of his day to treat the "real" knowledge of, for example, both jurisprudence and economics as "historical"—that is, as delineation of particular legal or economic systems in their specific temporal setting as unique without regard to general considerations.[9] In his mature phase, however, he emphasized the importance of general conceptualization in both fields which he formulated as consisting in ideal types.

Since Weber's lifetime some interesting developments have occurred in fields closer to the humanities than jurisprudence or economics, namely in "cultural" anthropology and linguistics. In "cultural" anthropology, there was a strong movement mainly in the United States that emphasized "cultural relativism," culminating perhaps in the work of Ruth Benedict. In recent years, however, many of the anthropologists who have been most strongly emphasizing their concern with culture have been breaking cultural *Gestalten* analytically into components capable of varying combinations with varying outcomes.

A parallel development has occurred, at least in part, in linguistics. Closely associated with "Benedictine" anthropology was the linguistic theory of Benjamin Whorf, which strongly stressed the total uniqueness of each particular language so that, some maintained, attempts at comparison across languages were entirely meaningless. These claims were very close to those of the late nineteenth-century German claims for the historical uniqueness of particular cultural and social systems. Yet there was surprisingly little awareness in Benedictine and Whorffian circles of the prior German discussions and the complicated problems at issue.

The mainstream of the development of linguistics has, however, followed another course—identifying, classifying, and systematizing sets of analytically defined components of linguistic systems. As is well known, this has occurred at two main levels, namely the phonetic, with the entities called phonemes, and the semantic, with those called morphemes. These units, which are definitely limited in number, are in principle comparable across languages. Their combina-

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tions define the different characteristics, including the unique ones, of particular modes of speech. Combinations occur according to discoverable "rules" at various levels, especially the higher ones we call grammar and syntax.

It seems clear that the long-alleged incompatibility of ideographic and nomothetic conceptualization in the same discipline is a false dilemma. Along with the issue of *Verstehen* versus causal explanation, I like to compare it with the old dilemma, still reverberating in my professional youth, of heredity *versus* environment. This older dilemma claimed that particular classes of life phenomena had to be explained in one *or* the other set of terms, never in a combination.[10] To see this as false seems to me to enable a large step toward the basic unification of the intellectual disciplines, including the place of the humanities among them.

The resolution of these dilemmas has occurred *only* through the attainment of new levels of insight into the nature and importance of theoretical abstraction. A heavy emphasis on "empiricism" tends to fragment the world of knowledge, because each class of concrete phenomena is in some respects always unique—whichever of many levels may be selected for emphasis—if no attempt is made to understand other aspects. Perhaps the natural sciences have, on the whole, been least resistant to recognizing the crucial role of abstract theory, the social and behavioral sciences next, and the humanities most resistant. The problem of the nature of theory in the humanities and its relation particularly to that of the social sciences must therefore be explicitly discussed.

Earlier I suggested that there is a close relation between logic, as part of philosophy and even mathematics, and the humanities. The uniqueness of these disciplines, for present purposes at least, may be said to lie in the fact that they are in a sense "purely" theoretical. They consist of theories abstracted from all particular empirical references. They are, it goes without saying, predominantly cognitively rational.

From this point of reference, we may speak of theory in the more usual sense, with an empirical component, insofar as it has to be theory *of* some class of objects, rather than of the logical structure itself. In a very general sense, this seems to be true of what has come to be called "information" theory, since information is an input to the system of reference from its environment, or, vice versa, an output to the environment. The theory then concerns the conditions of receiving, decoding, processing, encoding, and transmitting infor-

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mation. Information, however, is a cultural entity, not a kind of action nor physical object. Information theory has a bearing on a very broad empirical range. Linguistics may be considered to lie a little further along the road away from pure logic; that is, languages are empirically given mechanisms, as it is usually put, of expression and communication, but in some sense what is expressed and communicated is always information. Linguistics, therefore, concerns concrete mechanisms by which information is acquired, processed, and transmitted at the level of the symbolic-cultural nature of both content and process. Cybernetic theory is another recent addition to these highly generalized disciplines dealing with information and communication.

For the humanities, as with the other disciplines, it seems appropriate to suggest that the need for theory in the more usual sense rises in proportion to the increase in meaning *beyond* purely rational conceptual structures (and therefore unlike logic or mathematics) of the cultural content being studied; or, it may be stated alternatively, in proportion to their empiricism as disciplines. The theory needed must be *of* some set of cultural phenomena, and the cognitive understanding of these phenomena must not be only directly intuitive, but must involve conceptual and logical manipulations as well as observations to make the patterning of the phenomena accessible to rational understanding. Theory in this sense should be regarded as needed when cognitive structures—for example, in the sciences and philosophy—are themselves the objects of study but when, as historically presented, only parts of their relevant characteristics are evident on the basis of the given data alone.

Predominantly cognitive structures, however, constitute only part of what may, in present terms, be called the "structure of culture." I have found useful a classification[11] that comprises this and three other primary categories: "Expressive Symbolism," which presumably is closest to the cultural content of the arts; "Moral-Evaluative Symbolism," which is most directly involved with normative expectations for the guidance of action and the structure of social systems; and "Constitutive Symbolism," which is concerned with the symbolic "ground commitments" for defining the relevant aspects of the human condition as a whole, as most generally manifested in the core symbolism of religious systems. The last concerns what, in a more cognitive frame, Weber called the "answers" to the ultimate "problems of meaning."

Professor Frye's conception of the proper role of literary criticism

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seems to focus on the use of expressive symbolism as the object category to be theoretically analyzed and explained, with, however, clear openness to the underlying role of what I here call constitutive and also moral-evaluative symbolism—or "values" for short. In such realms lies the primary role of the "pure" theory of the humanistic disciplines. As a kind of object, it differs profoundly from theory in the other intellectual disciplines, but as *theory* it is subject to essentially the same standards of empirical validity, conceptual clarity, and logical correctness of inference as is theory in other fields.

III

What of the problems that I have called "contextual" above relative to the study of a cultural phenomenon or class of them? It should be clear that these may involve reference to humanistic concerns other than the one central to the study in question, such as the bearing of scientific ideas on the work of a given poet. The more massive developments, however, concern subject-matters in which the social-behavioral sciences are involved.[12] They can be very well illustrated by the case of sociology, with which I am most familiar and which is, in fact, the topic of this paper.

Let us start this time with sociology. Weber's famous definition called it "a science [*Wissenschaft*] which attempts the interpretive understanding [*deutend Verstehen*] of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects." The only stricture I should apply to the definition is that, for purposes of sociology and, indeed, of "action" in general, Weber ties it too closely to the "individual" rather than to the system of social *inter*-action—but this is a technical point.

Now the components of social motivation—Weber's "intended meanings"—clearly include elements of culture, which are "oriented to" by social actors and, even more important, which are often "internalized" in the personalities of individuals and "institutionalized" in social systems. A type case for Weber was the constitutive symbolism of religious movements, including its "rationalization" in terms of belief systems. Content problems of this kind are clearly the province of certain humanistic disciplines. Some of the German writers already referred to concluded from this that *only* humanistic study of such subjects was legitimate, definitely *not* sociological study. Weber, of course, took the alternative view that

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the concrete objects should be the concern of *both* humanistic and sociological study and that these should complement each other.

Indeed, at the human level there is no social system that does not concretely involve cultural components, the study of which is a proper humanistic task. But such phenomena as institutionalization and the whole complex matter of the interplay between values and norms, and physical, economic, and political conditions simply cannot be understood in terms of humanistic theory alone, if by that is meant anything like what was outlined in the preceding section of this paper.

Indeed, in the history of the socio-cultural disciplines, there was what can only be considered a tragic chapter because it led to so much waste of talent and effort—namely, the development of "idealistic" social theories. These, starting prominently with Hegel, and going on through such writers as Dilthey and Werner Sombart, attempted to treat "history," as we would say today, as process of "emanation" of ideas or, better, of culture patterns. In a sense Marx' theory was the extreme reaction against this, with Marx, as he himself said, "standing Hegel on his head." Weber, however, and many others have refused to accept the dilemma.

This argument indicates that once the humanist gets into what I have called contextual problems, he needs help from the sociologist, and not only the sociologist, but from practitioners of the other action disciplines. Equally, because of the role of culture in social systems, the sociologist and his brethren are in need of help from the humanist at a variety of appropriate points.

Given the general view of the structure of the intellectual disciplines that has been presented here, the existence of this mutual need seems clear—it follows from the fact that each discipline or sub-group of them should be characterized by a relatively "pure" body of theory special to it. Just what the classifications and boundaries should be is too complicated and detailed a problem to take up in this very general setting.

We can, however, extend the analysis of the setting of the problem on a general level. The key conception is a consequence of the abstract nature of theory in all of the intellectual disciplines: Since more than one distinguishable theoretical scheme applies to the same concrete set of phenomena, the zone where any *two* of them apply must be a zone where there are specific and ascertainable modes of interdependence between the variables that figure in the two schemes. Such a zone I should like to call, in a specifically tech-

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nical sense, a zone of *interpenetration* between the empirical systems that are analyzed by the relevant theoretical schemes. The cases of internalized and institutionalized cultural patterns to which I referred above are conspicuous cases of interpenetration between psychological and cultural systems and social systems respectively. I should infer from this that the personality psychologist, concerned with the effectiveness of the internalization of social norms in a personality, must have an adequate knowledge of the nature of those norms as a cultural entity to be able successfully to state the problem of the conditions of success or failure of their internalization in the course of personality development. In the case of institutionalization, it is even more clear that knowledge—for example, of the structure of a set of religiously grounded values and their context in the more general cultural system—is essential to the sociological student of their role in the social system, though this knowledge is by no means enough.

Perhaps I may illustrate in terms of a famous case with which I have been personally concerned for many years—namely, that of the values of the "Protestant Ethic" in their relation not only to "capitalism" as a mode of economic organization, but much more generally to the structure of modern Western society. Weber himself provided a very extensive analysis of the cultural system involved, including especially, first, the relation between the system of theological beliefs and their ethical consequences for the action of individuals in secular contexts and, second, the "immanent" process of change in these implications from the first generation to the stage of "Puritanism" in the seventeenth century. Weber's cultural analysis was strongly reinforced by the comparisons he made with the *cultural* structure of other world religions, notably those of China and India.

Important additions to the Protestant Ethic story have been made by other social scientists: by Benjamin Nelson, with respect to the history of the doctrine of usury; by Robert Merton, with respect to the extension from economic behavior to scientific investigation; by Robert Bellah and Clifford Geertz, with respect to the importance of similar cultural themes in non-Western religions (Japanese Buddhism and Islam respectively); by Johannes Loubser, with respect to the post-Puritan developmental alternatives between a frozen "Fundamentalist" conservatism (in his work, South African Calvinism) and a liberal view of religious freedom (Massachusetts); and by S. N. Eisenstadt, in a general review.[13]

All of the above social scientists have been steeped in certain

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branches of humanistic learning, both in addition to and as part of their social science expertise in their own fields. In addition, I have found the work of a number of specifically humanistic scholars to be indispensable to my own understanding of this very central problem context. I should like to mention in particular Kenneth Burke's essay on *The First Three Chapters of Genesis,* Perry Miller's elucidation of the whole panorama of the religio-cultural development of New England, James Luther Adams' work on various aspects of Protestantism, and the investigations of David Little into the relation of the Calvinistic-Puritan conception of order and the development of English Common Law.[14] I think the main focus of my own humanistic interests in this area, and of the definition of their relevance to my sociological interests, lay in what Frye would consider the internal structure of the ascetic Protestant "myth of concern" and certain of its cultural ramifications.

What then of the noncultural factors involved in institutionalization, accounting for its success or failure to occur? In order to be brief, perhaps it is best to concentrate on the factors of political organization and power. The selectivity in the spread of the Reformation is well known, both generally and with respect to the success of its different branches. Perhaps the role of political factors is first made evident in the dependence of Luther's own movement in its early phases on the German princes with whom he formed alliances. This had much to do with a certain strongly conservative cast, in a sociopolitical sense, of the Lutheran branch. Many students, including Weber, however, have missed the significance of the special Prussian situation in which the house of Hohenzollern early became converted to Calvinism while the mass of the population were Lutherans.

The fact that the whole "southern tier" of European states remained solidly Catholic and identified with the Counter-Reformation had to do, of course, with cultural characteristics of the Latin peoples, but surely also with the political position of the Hapsburg Empire (then including both Austria and Spain) and its special political relations with the Papacy. France is a particularly important case because, though a Latin culture, the Protestant movement came very close to ascendancy; since then France has been substantially less solidly Catholic than most other Latin societies.

Particularly interesting, however, is the selectivity of the spread of the Calvinistic branch of the Reformation. With a variety of important exceptions—such as Calvin's own Geneva, the related

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Zwinglian movement centering in German Switzerland, a brief flourishing in Vienna, and a tenacious movement in Hungary—its main locus was the "Northwest Corner" of the European system, namely England, Holland, and France, the last temporarily until the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Especially in England and Holland in the seventeenth century, political conditions were far more favorable to the Puritan branch of Protestantism than anywhere in Southern Europe or in primarily Lutheran territory. Above all, it took hold among the higher merchant classes and important sectors of the gentry so that when the Parliamentary settlement came in 1688, the Puritan element was integral to it. In addition, a level of religious toleration was established that gave the nonconformist churches relative security from then on. Moreover, the noncomformist branches of English Protestantism were the principal source of the settlers of the English American colonies and, hence, of a grand-scale opening for ascetic Protestantism to shape the underlying culture of the "First New Nation."[15]

It would be inappropriate to elaborate these themes further on the present occasion. They are meant to illustrate some of the complex ways in which the institutionalization of a major cultural pattern has been interdependent with factors in the social system that cannot be called primarily cultural. Of course, concrete political organization and interests are only part of a larger, predominantly noncultural complex. Very much included in the present context of relevance are the modes of organization, interests, and especially relations to government of different organized religious bodies.[16]

In back of factors concerning church and state, there lie in turn those factors concerning the constitution of the societal community, along with religious factors—those we call "ethnicity" in relation to nationality; the nature of class structure, including the importance and kind of aristocracy and its relation to "bourgeois" classes, peasantry, and so forth; and beyond that, kinds of family and kinship structure.

It is a particularly important methodological point that the *ad hoc* discrimination between cultural and social system factors, on the basis of ordinary knowledge of historical cases, is at best a crude first approximation to the theoretically satisfactory analysis of interdependence in the zone of interpenetration. Progress beyond this *ad hoc* level requires generalization about the operation of these factors on both sides. This, of course, requires systematic *comparative* study of variations as between situations that are similar in

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some respects but different in others. Weber's comparative studies and his elaborate scheme of ideal types constituted an early attempt at such comparative systematization. His work in some ways still stands as a model, but can be said to have been improved upon at many points since his time.

I should like to reiterate that the relations between the object-classes appropriate to the different intellectual disciplines that I have designated as meeting in zones of interpenetration depend not only on the development of the pure theory of each of the disciplines, but on the appropriate empirical work at each of these "cores." Throughout the spectrum of the disciplines, a notable phenomenon of the present century has been the development of interstitial disciplines; in the natural sciences, we may call attention to physical chemistry and biochemistry. Somewhat closer to our own area is social psychology, which has played a very important part on the borderline between psychology and sociology. Within the social category political economy has a long history, and a field called political sociology has recently emerged into prominence.

It is perhaps correct to say that such interstitial disciplines attempt to draw on theoretical resources from both sides of the line. Empirically, then, they concentrate on facts that bear on the relevant zone of interpenetration and are concerned to attempt to unravel the relations of interdependence to be found in this zone.

A good illustration of what I should call a set of problems of social psychology predominantly concerns the "socialization" of the personality of the individual through interaction—with parents, siblings, peers, other relatives, neighbors, and teachers—in the process of "growing up." A considerable body of knowledge has developed in this area drawing conspicuously from both psychology and sociology and also, in comparative perspective, anthropology. It is important to note, however, that concretely there are never only two disciplines involved. For example, in this case the cultural content of what is learned—for example, "internalized" in the above sense—is often of major importance. Social psychologists usually take such content as given, but even then it must be *understood,* which I take to mean in humanistic terms.

There seem to be two disciplines that are particularly important as occupying an interstitial position between the humanities and sociology. The more obvious one is history. At one level, of course, history has been a kind of matrix from which the various social disciplines have differentiated, and each of them has tended to have

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branches with historical emphases, such as economic history or political history. Only gradually have these taken on a truly interstitial character so that, for example, the economic historian has had to have a real command of general economics, especially economic theory; but this has clearly been the trend.

In somewhat the same vein we can speak of a distinction between "social history," which would not presume any special sociological competence on the part of the historian in question, but only a focus on the "social aspects" of his society and period, and, on the other hand, "historical sociology," which *would* presume such competence and a conscious attempt to use it. I think in two different fields and generations two eminent examples may be cited of men who advanced far in the direction of sociological history; in religion, Ernst Troeltsch, who was a close friend and associate of Max Weber; and in socio-political history, Marc Bloch, who was greatly influenced by Durkheim and his circle. It is probably correct to say that the number following in their footsteps has been increasing—a good recent example would be Bernard Bailyn—and that they are paying increasing attention to their sociology, when, as is true for the considerable majority, their disciplinary identification is history. The state of advancement of sociology in the relevant empirical fields is a primary consideration in determining whether it is worth a busy historian's trouble to learn more sociology.

The second, less obvious case of a discipline interstitial between the humanities and sociology is anthropology, especially with the American emphasis on *cultural* anthropology. It may first be noted that the historic concern of anthropologists with "primitive" or, as they prefer to say today, "nonliterate" peoples has disposed them to a field where the differentiation between cultural and social systems is not highly advanced. For example, religious organization is usually an "aspect" of that of the society more generally; there is no structurally distinct "church."

If, however, as has been a trend for some time, anthropology is tending less to be a study of a particular class of socio-cultural systems and more one of the relations between social organization and culture, the interstitial position seems to be appropriate. Thus, in studies of "primitive religion," it deals with a wide variety of myths of concern in the sense used by Frye and also by Lévi-Strauss. On the other hand, the immense variety of anthropological studies of kinship are mainly sociological in character. The two

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aspects are, of course, very interdependent, but, from the point of view taken here, the study of such interdependence is a special task of an interstitial discipline.

This point of view, applied both to history and to anthropology, helps to resolve some old difficulties in the classification of the sciences. In the case of history, it should help to overcome what many theoretically-inclined social scientists have felt to be an unjustified defensive insistence that the concerns of history were purely empirical and that *any* sort of theory had no place in it—the famous formula that the historian should tell the story "as it actually happened." To do so and to remain objective on such terms seems impossible to the modern scientist. The historian, like all other scientists, needs theory, both on the humanistic and the social side. If "social" here is taken sufficiently broadly, it includes not only sociological, but also economic, political, and psychological theory.

For the case of anthropology, the problem has been that of how far the focus on cultural concerns deprived anthropology of access to the resources for *dynamic* analysis which reside in the study of motivated *action*. The purest humanistic theory is not, I have suggested, part of the "theory of action," but of the nature and meanings of cultural content. Anthropology, if treated as an interstitial discipline, should be particularly concerned with such content and its technical theoretical analysis, but at the same time it is technically and professionally concerned with the articulation of such culture in the processes of action particularly relevant to social organization.

IV

I should now like to return to two general problem areas in which, from the point of view of the sociologist, the relations between sociology and the humanities, particularly theory of humanistic content, and the interrelations between humanistic and social-scientific variables are apparent. The first concern is the argument over the factors operative in socio-cultural processes and the differences in their character and modes of interrelation. Here there has been much controversy over the "role of ideas," or in the German version, the relation between *Idealfaktoren* and *Realfaktoren*, a discussion in which "historical materialism" has figured prominently. In their late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century forms, these discussions now seem quaintly old-fashioned. This fact relates

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to a major change in the intellectual climate of a whole range of disciplines during the last generation. The older "materialist reductionism" alleged that "only" the more elementary components of systems "really" counted—that is, "particles" in classical mechanics, the simpler chemical constituents of living organisms, "instincts" and conditioned reflexes in behavior, and "economic motives" at the societal level. This concept has by and large ceased to dominate, more by a process of "evaporation" than of refutation. Such ideas have given way to conceptions of "organization" of various kinds and at various levels. Organization seems inherently to involve a component of hierarchy. The new emphasis in this conception of hierarchy, however, is not on the old question of "what determines"—often allegedly "in the last analysis"—as on the question of who "has the real power" in a social system.

The most creative contribution that has shifted emphasis from this question has, I think, been the above-mentioned cybernetic idea of "control," with its closely related conceptions of the processing of information and "feedback." In the case of genetic theory in biology, the question of explaining the maintenance of a species type is no longer posed in terms of whether the mechanism is "ultimately" chemical or some kind of "entelechy," but what *kind* of chemical mechanism in what kind of setting of "organization"?

Spanning the gap between the human socio-cultural and the organic realms has long been difficult, perhaps especially in this case. Gradually, however, it has come to be clear that cultural systems play a part in human organization that is not only paralleled or "analogous" to the genes at the organic level, but is another instance of the general phenomenon of cybernetic control. This was first vividly brought home to me by the biologist Alfred Emerson in discussions at a conference on the analogous functions—in the good biological sense of analogy—between the gene and what he called the "symbol." By "symbol," Emerson meant the whole sphere of symbolic systems in which we can create and "store" sets of *codified* meanings.

There are several aspects to the parallel. One lies in the fact that culture can be and is not only differentiated from the processes of ordinary social interaction, but also, in certain respects, is separated out and placed in especially protected positions. In this respect, the distinction between culture and social system resembles that between germ plasm and somatoplasm, so central to biological theory.

In this context, written language and other modes of "perma-

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nent" embodiment of cultural meaning systems takes on a special significance. In addition to the developments of printing and (eventually) "taping" and similar devices for preserving nonverbal meaning systems (for example, in stone or on canvas) writing makes it possible to separate the meaning system from the context of its genesis and to extend its general impact to an indefinite range of other contexts. For example, whatever the significance of the Homeric poems in the oral tradition of early Greece, they could not have had a major impact on subsequent civilizations unless there had been written *texts,* the "authenticity" of which could be tested—of course, by humanistic procedures. This set of circumstances has seemed to me so important that, along with many others (including, I am happy to learn, Professor Frye), I have come to regard literacy—of more than a small esoteric group—as the single most important criterion for transition from "primitive" to more advanced societies.

In what sense, then, can patterned and "protected" cultural systems be said to "control" social interaction and the action of individuals? We cannot, in general, say this control exists simply when such a cultural system exercises power or authority in the usual senses. If it comes to be "institutionalized," "internalized," or both, it will have to be legitimized; though if it is a set of "legal" norms, it may also be "enforced." The central phenomenon, however, is the provision of "standards" or "models" for the regulation of action. They give selective clues to what information about conditions of action is relevant to the attainment of what goals. They provide ways of organizing and codifying such information in relevant terms. Finally, and particularly important, as the course of action proceeds, they provide ways of testing whether and in what respects it is proceeding "according to plan," or, because "wrong turns" have been taken or because of the intervention of unforeseeable or uncontrollable circumstances, how a change is indicated—this, of course, is the process of "feedback." The most essential point is that, without the stabilization and purposiveness made possible by the *cultural* components of action, action tends to become "reactive" to the exigencies of immediate and shifting situations rather than more stably "oriented" with respect to them.

It is essential to be clear that cultural and social systems interpenetrate at a multiplicity of levels. Like genetic constitutions, cultural patterning is not confined to the highest cybernetic levels of complex systems. The individual organism is constituted by the

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unification of two germ cells, not only from the two sexes, but from relatively distantly related strains in the "gene pool" of the species. We may speak analogously of the primary "constitutive" culture of a civilization, in which its religious anchorage clearly plays a central part. But every primary sub-system of a complex society must have its own "sub-culture" which, though differentiated from the central one, is also a "specification" of it. Similarly, every organ system and individual cell of a concrete organism has its genetic components that "regulate" its developmental and "physiological" processes.

Relating these general considerations to the more detailed problems of concrete social systems is a large part of the increasingly complex task of sociological science; not much further can be said about them here. At every step, however, what we call institutionalization requires the combination of "symbolic," or what in some sense are "normative," factors with those that are conditional relative to the system of reference. It follows from what has just been said that at the levels at which we social scientists operate, the concrete conditional factors always include cultural components and, by virtue of this, are cybernetically "self-regulating" systems at their own levels. The distinction between normative and conditional is thus *not* the basis of a classification of concrete systems, but of components in the whole range of relevant types of systems. If culture is so important as a source of the "control" of social processes, then obviously sociologists need the best possible understanding of it.

Secondly, there are two cultural contexts about which, in conclusion, something more specific should be said. These are what I referred to above as the "constitutive" symbolic structures of cultures that provide the more "ultimate" points of reference for social action, and the modes of normative patterning, often called "values." In both contexts, the sociologist poses very specific questions to certain humanistic fields.

"Constitutive" culture may be looked upon, as Pareto did under the heading of "Residues," as constituting the "major premises" of a whole system of culture, ramifying in various directions and to various levels.[17] This formulation, however, gives undue prominence to the cognitive aspect of a cultural system, there clearly being other "dimensions." One scheme of "labelling" such other dimensions would be as "instrumental," "expressive," and "constitutive" in the sense under discussion here.

From this point of view, "major premises" would be the main

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point of articulation between primarily cognitive "belief systems" and the constitutive symbolism of a culture. The latter is close to what is frequently meant by primary religious orientations. An example is the patterning of ancient Egyptian culture around the institution of the Pharaoh as both divine and human, articulating the supernatural order with that of human society and both biological and physical nature. A particularly important feature is the stress on temporal continuity with a special conception of the unity of the death of the passing Pharaoh and the birth of his successor, which underlies the famous Egyptian "cult of the dead."[18]

Another exceptionally well analyzed example is that of classical Chinese culture heading up to the "master symbols"—Granet prefers not to call them "concepts," introducing instead the term *emblêmes* —of Yang, Yin, and Tao.[19] These symbols "constitute" the patterning of a "cosmic" order of birth and death and of the cyclical alternation in relative predominance of the "opposites" Yang and Yin. Human society, then, is in a sense "ritually" made to conform to this order.

Still another example is the constitutive symbolism of Christianity, with atonement for sin brought about through the sacrificial death of Jesus and the constitution of the church as the "mystical body of Christ," conceived in precisely the cybernetic sense referred to above, to "control" the human condition.[20] One facet of its importance lay in an "individualizing" orientation to morality, dissociating it from the continuity of ethnic groups and their kinship constituents, as has remained prominent for Judaism.

As cognitively "rationalized," such constitutive culture takes the form of theology or sometimes of "ideology." I should treat historical materialism as such a set of constitutive symbols for the "political religion" of Marxism-Leninism. Surely the "dialectic of history" is not an empirical entity in the usual sense of the empirical sciences. It can also be put in more "expressive" terms, often "narratively" as "myth" or in the form of overt action as "ritual," which is often explicitly understood to be a process of "acting out" of a myth.[21]

From the point of view of cybernetic control, constitutive symbolism may be regarded as the "master template" of the general system of action. It can and does change, of course; witness the substantial variety of such systems that have appeared in human history—including the unrecorded history of nonliterate peoples. It is in general more stable than the other structures of action systems, however, and it changes by different processes.

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Whereas constitutive culture is generally delineated in the "existential" mood—it is a symbolization of what allegedly "is" or, in the case of narrative myths, "was"—values take the imperative mood. They are, to quote Clyde Kluckhohn, "conceptions of the desirable": of what ought, or ought not, to be.[22] The desirability in question does not "inhere" in a valued object itself, but in its *relations* to human needs, wishes, interests, or obligations.[23]

Values, in the above meaning, are in the first instance cultural entities. The term "conception" as used by Kluckhohn is not confined to the purely cognitive meaning, but includes the element of obligation to "implement"—Kluckhohn carefully distinguished desirable from "merely desired." As such, through the processes we have referred to as institutionalization and internalization, values may become constitutive components of social and personality systems respectively.

Of course, any human being can "evaluate" any object of which he is cognizant, including those that existed only in the past—such as historical personages—and those that, in "anticipation" or some other form of imagination, are held to be desirable but do not currently exist. Not all evaluations of objects, however, are actual components of social and personality systems. For the social system, the important class contains conceptions of the *desirable kind of society* (or other kind of social system), as applied to the society of which the evaluating individual *is himself a member*. In such a case, institutionalized values cannot be a stable structural component of the social system unless, to some degree, the evaluations of it are shared—that is, are common to most of the members.

The concept desirable is, of course, normative in reference. Hence the actual state of affairs in a social system may accord well or ill with the values of its members. If the accord is good, because of "commitment" to the values, there will be an incentive to try to preserve the relevant states of affairs; whereas if the accord is bad, there will be "value tension" or "normative pressure" in the direction of change, though this change may be blocked by other factors, toward a higher level of implementation.[24] The key role of values in social systems is thus one of the principal reasons why the humanities are of critical significance to sociology.

As in the more general aspects of the "role of culture" in human affairs that have been discussed, the above statement touches only the most general orientation points of the problem. It has often been tempting to assume that, relevant to a given social system,

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there is *a* value or pattern of value-orientation. But only at the *very* highest relevant level of cybernetic hierarchy does this hold, and even this level must be articulated with a variety of nonsocial connections, such as to other components of cultural systems, to personalities, and indeed to organic levels.

With social systems, even structurally very simple ones like a nuclear family, it is essential to speak not of "its value pattern," but of its *system* of value patterns. This system is differentiated both by *level* of specification—for example, by a particular class of situational exigencies—and specification to functionally differentiated sub-systems, including roles. Thus we have the question of *what* more particularized obligations are "imposed" by a more general value—commitment for particular situations is at least as important as the question of "whether" the acting unit is generally disposed to implement its value commitments.

Finally, though less so than constitutive symbolism, basic value patterns in societies are relatively very stable, although the systems involving them are subject to evolutionary as well as other kinds of change. In sufficiently complex societies, value commitments come to be generalized to the point of constituting a generalized symbolic medium of interchange, similar to money. As such, the system comes to be subject to disturbances that are in some respects similar to inflationary and deflationary processes in the economy. "Inflation" of value commitments can occur when promises too far outrun realistic possibilities of implementation, through the mobilization of the primary factors of institutionalization, such as necessary collective loyalties and capacity for effective collective action.

An "inflated" system in this sense, then, is vulnerable to "deflationary" movements. These in general take the form of "reduction" to lower levels of generalization and hence more diffuse and "absolutistic" commitments. In Max Weber's terms, they involve a shift from *Verantwortungsethik* in the direction of *Gesinnungsethik*. I have several times used the term "fundamentalism" to designate their characteristics.

This is a major source of the conviction of "moral decline" in rapidly developing societies. It tends to be associated with relative political extremism, of both the right and left, however much these may differ from each other.

I am well aware that these last remarks have been cryptic. They are introduced only as a form of warning against what seems to me

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to be the highly prevalent oversimplification of the analysis of the role of values in the functioning of complex social systems.

It should not be inferred from this discussion that the primary, to say nothing of sole, significance of human culture lies in its regulation of action in other contexts. Actors in such spheres as artistic "expression" and various modes of religious primacy are often relatively indifferent, if not in some cases positively hostile, to serving the functional needs of social systems or of individuals. But the sociologist's interest in culture, and hence his use to the humanities, cannot be wholly divorced from such problems. Insofar as he presumes to be "his own humanist," he cannot be totally "pure"; yet the "impurity" of his approach is not illegitimate. Its justifications rest on the generally acknowledged significance of science, some crucial features of its structure, and the potential value of its applications.

If there is one single impression I should like the above discussion to leave with my humanistic colleagues, it is that of the continuities of cognitive pattern shared by all the intellectual disciplines. The case of continuity central to this paper concerns the role and nature of theory in all of them. Theory in the intellectual disciplines consists of coherent generalized concepts and propositions that can analyze abstractly defined aspects of the phenomena with which each discipline is concerned, also allowing, of course, for the shadings and interpenetrations that have seemed so important to me. This and the sharing of standards of empirical validity, with respect to whatever sources of factual information are relevant, are the two main aspects of a claim to standing as an intellectual discipline.

The importance of this set of considerations may be illustrated by a problem that, again, has been very cogently stated by Professor Frye in his paper. Frye states that the literary critic should abstain from "judgements of value." In this statement, which he repeats more than once, he seems to be aligning himself (though not explicitly) with Max Weber's famous advocacy of a "value-free" social science (*Wertfreiheit*). If the formula is properly interpreted, I think it is a sound one, but especially recently it has been widely misinterpreted.[25] It does not mean that the scientist or scholar should be free of *all* value commitments. Rather, because he is, *qua* scholar, performing a differentiated role in society, in this capacity he should be scrupulous in adhering to the values involved in *this* function and should not permit the values of other functions to

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obtrude. As scholar, he should implement the values that I have referred to as those of cognitive rationality, which "implementation" requires adherence to the standards of theoretical clarity and precision and of empirical objectivity and validity. These standards, and the criteria for judging whether and how adequately they are met, are analytically independent of values having to do, for example, with the desirability for the scholar as citizen of a particular political state of affairs and goals, however urgent those goals may be. The same holds for the "expressive" stature of particular artistic creations. This differentiation of function, and of the standards appropriate for evaluation of the performance of a function, should be regarded as common ground for the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities—in short, for all the intellectual disciplines.

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1. See Talcott Parsons and Edward Shils, eds., *Toward a General Theory of Action* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1951; reprinted as a Harper Torchbook).

2. "Unity and Diversity in the Modern Intellectual Disciplines: The Role of the Social Scientist," *Dædalus* (Winter, 1965); reprinted in Gerald Holton, ed., *Science and Culture* (Houghton Mifflin: Boston, 1965), and in my own collection of essays, *Sociological Theory and Modern Society* (The Free Press: New York, 1967).

3. With respect to at least the one major branch of the humanities, literary criticism, I am pleased to find myself in the same company with Professor Frye (see his paper in this issue) and with another scholar whose work has influenced me greatly, namely Kenneth Burke. Cf. especially his *Rhetoric of Religion* (Beacon Press: Boston, 1961).

4. Professor Bloomfield (see this issue) makes this factor of "experience" a major reference of his conception of the humanities. How far this should be held to be so distinctive as almost to remove the humanities from the category of intellectual disciplines that include the other two groups, I do not know. My own inclination, however, is to treat it strongly as the empirical component of this category of discipline, drastically different from that of natural science, but holding a parallel position in the structure of the discipline. Curiously, Bloomfield contrasts this aspect of the humanities drastically with "science," as he calls it, without ever mentioning the similar problems of the social-behavioral disciplines that have become accustomed to think of themselves as sciences.

5. Thus the empirical component of science has clearly been understood not to be "rational," only the theoretical part. In logic and mathematics, however, both the object and the observer's analysis of it are (ideally) rational.

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6. Reprinted in Donald R. Cutler, ed., *The Religious Situation* (Beacon Press: Boston, 1968).

7. The term *Geist* in this usage is derived primarily from Hegel and in the background of the relevant controversies was used by Dilthey. The term *Kultur* was more associated with the neo-Kantian tradition for the controversies of reference utilized by Windelband and Rickert.

8. Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther* (W. W. Norton: New York, 1958).

9. Weber elucidated a theoretical schema which, while general in scope, did justice to particular legal and economic systems. Even in such fields, however, Weber fell short of attainable levels of synthesis of the individualizing and generalizing aspects of scientific theory. His "ideal type" mode of conceptualization entailed certain rigidities which unnecessarily constrained his theory's capacity to deal with the independent variation of different components of action systems. Cf. my *Structure of Social Action* (The Free Press: New York, 1949), Chapter XVII.

10. Cf. H. S. Jennings, *The Biological Basis of Human Nature* (W. W. Norton: New York, 1930).

11. Talcott Parsons, Edward Shils, Kaspar Naegele, and Jesse Pitts, eds., "Introduction to Part Four," *Theories of Society* (The Free Press: New York, 1961), pp. 963-97.

12. The reader will note that I have used the hyphenated designation social-behavioral a number of times to designate this set of disciplines. I should prefer the "action sciences," but such a term would not be very widely understood or accepted and is subject to one obvious misconstruction. The duality results from the placement of psychology which, with its concentration on the individual, is often not felt to be appropriately included under the rubric "social" and which also in certain respects merges in the direction of biology.

13. Benjamin Nelson, *The Idea of Usury* (2d edition; University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1969); Robert Merton, "Puritanism, Pietism and Science," reprinted in *Social Theory and Social Structure* (revised edition; The Free Press: New York, 1957); Robert Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion* (The Free Press: New York, 1957); Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (The Free Press: New York, 1960); *Islam Observed* (Yale University Press: New Haven; 1968); Jan Loubser, "Calvinism, Equality, and Inclusion: The Case of Afrikaner Calvinism," in S. N. Eisenstadt, ed., *The Protestant Ethic and Modernization: A Comparative View* (Basic Books: New York, 1963), and "Puritanism and Religious Liberty: Change in the Normative Order in Massachusetts, 1630-1850," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (Harvard University, 1964); S. N. Eisenstadt "The Protestant Ethic Thesis in an Analytical and Comparative Framework," *The Protestant Ethic and Modernization* (Basic Books: New York, 1968). The last contains a useful bibliography.

14. Kenneth Burke, in *The Rhetoric of Religion;* Perry Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1956; reprinted as a Harper Torchbook); David Little, *The New Order in Old England*

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(Harper and Row: New York, 1967); James Luther Adams, essay in his translation of Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1948).

15. Cf. Perry Miller's work, especially *Errand Into the Wilderness*, and Seymour Martin Lipset, *The First New Nation* (Basic Books: New York, 1963; reprinted as an Anchor Paperback).

16. In a recent analysis of the bases of party organization and voting alignment in Europe, Lipset and Rokkan have shown that even for the present century the *history* of relations of church and state, for example, predominantly a Catholic established church or a "national" church of, say, the Lutheran variety constitutes a major factor. Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan, "Cleavage Structure, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments: An Introduction," in *Party Systems and Voter Alignments* (The Free Press: New York, 1967).

17. Vilfredo Pareto, *The Mind and Society*, translated by A. Bongiorno and A. Livingston (Harcourt: New York, 1935) 4 vols. Pareto's work is also discussed in Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* (The Free Press: New York, 1949).

18. Cf. Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1948); also see T. Parsons, *Societies, Evolutionary and Comparative Perspectives* (Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, 1966).

19. Marcel Granet, *La Pensée Chinoise* (A. Michel: Paris, 1950).

20. Cf. Talcott Parsons, "Christianity," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, David Sills, ed. (The MacMillan Company and the Free Press: New York, 1968).

21. Cf. Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion, op. cit.*

22. Clyde Kluckhohn and others, "Values and Value-Orientation in the Theory of Action," in T. Parsons and Edward Shils, eds., *Toward a General Theory of Action, op. cit.*

23. An important social science tradition does treat the object as "a value." For the origins of this tradition, see W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1918). This view has been followed by some political scientists: cf. Harold D. Laswell, *The Analysis of Political Behavior* (K. Paul, Trench, Trubner: London, 1947); also David Easton, *A Framework for Political Analysis* (Prentice-Hall: Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1965).

24. On the use of the term "commitment" in this context, see my article "On the Concept of Value Commitments," *Sociological Inquiry*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (Spring, 1968), pp. 135-59.

25. Cf. Talcott Parsons, "Evaluation and Objectivity in the Social Sciences: An Interpretation of Max Weber's Contributions," reprinted in *Sociological Theory and Modern Society* (The Free Press: New York, 1967). This essay in the original German, appeared in Otto Stammer, ed., *Max Weber und die Soziologie Heute* (J. C. B. Mohr: Tübingen, 1965).

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